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# SERPENTINE CONSTRUCTIONS: LUCRETIUS, *DE RERVM NATVRA* 3.657–63[1]

quin etiam tibi si lingua uibrante micanti[2]
serpentis cauda procero corpore utrumque
sit libitum in multas partis discidere ferro,
omnia iam sorsum cernes ancisa recenti
uolnere tortari et terram conspargere tabo,
ipsam seque retro partem petere ore priorem
uolneris ardenti ut morsu premat icta dolore.

[1] In the preparation of this paper the following editions of *De rerum nat*. were consulted; pre-1850 editions, i.e. before the publication of Lachmann's edition, are accompanied by their number in C.A. Gordon (with introduction and notes by E.J. Kenney), *A Bibliography of Lucretius* (Winchester, 1985[2]); editions of the whole poem are listed first, followed by separate editions of Book 3:

Bailey, C. (1900, 1922[2]), *Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*. Oxford.
—— (1947), *Titi Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex: Edited with Prolegomena, Critical Apparatus, Translation, and Commentary*, 3 vols. Oxford.
Bernays, J. (1852), *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*. Leipzig.
Bockemüller, F. (1873), *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri VI*. Stade.
Brieger, A. (1894), *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura*. Leipzig.
Büchner, K. (1966), *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura*. Wiesbaden.
Candidus, P. (1512), *T. Lucretii Cari De Rerum Natura Libri VI*. Florence. Accessed online at http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/010823523. Gordon 5.
Diels, H. (1923–4), *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex* (with German translation), 2 vols. Berlin.
Ernout, A. (1920, 1966[10]), *Lucrèce. De la nature: Texte établi et traduit*. Paris.
—— and Robin, L. (1925–8), *Lucrèce. De Rerum Natura: Commentaire exégétique et critique*, 3 vols. Paris.
Flores, E. (2002–9), *Titus Lucretius Carus: De Rerum Natura* (with Italian translation), 3 vols. Naples.
Giussani, C. (1896–8), *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex: Revisione del testo, commento e studi introduttivi*, 4 vols. Turin.
Lachmann, C. (1850), *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*. Berlin.
Lambinus, D. (1570), *T. Lucretii Cari De Rerum Natura Libri VI*. Paris. Gordon 102A.
Leonard, W.E. and Smith, S.B. (1942), *Titi Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex: Edited with Introduction and Commentary*. Madison.
Martin, J. (1934, 1963[5]), *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*. Leipzig.
Merrill, W.A. (1907), *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex* (with commentary). New York.
—— (1917), *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*. Berkeley.
Müller, K. (1975), *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura ibri Sex*. Zurich.
Munro, H.A.J. (1860), *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*. Cambridge.
—— (1864, 1886[4]), *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex: with Notes and a Translation*, 3 vols. Cambridge.
Orth, E. (1961), *Lukrez: Naturphilosophie. Lucretius De Rerum Natura*. Salamanca.
Smith, M.F. (1975, 1982[2]), *Lucretius: De Rerum Natura*. Cambridge, MA and London.
Valentí, E. (1961), *T. Lucrecio Caro: De La Naturaleza. Texto revisado y traducido*, 2 vols. Barcelona.
Wakefield, G. (1813), *T. Lucretii Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*. Glasgow. Gordon 115B.

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657 micanti *Lachmann* : minanti *O* : *om*. *Q* 658 cauda *O corr*.: caude *OQ* 659 discedere *Q* 661 tortari *O* : ortari *Q* : rotari *Q corr*. 662 retro *Laurentianus* 35.30 : reretro *OQ*

What's more, if you should feel inclined to cut up with a blade both parts of a snake with darting tongue, quivering tail and long body, you will see all the cut up pieces separately twisting and turning from the fresh wound and spattering the ground with gore, and the front part actually attacking itself in the rear with its mouth to bite itself, stung by the wound's burning pain.[3]

The example of the snake cut into pieces, quoted above, comes roughly in the middle of a series of some thirty proofs (3.417–829) presented by Lucretius to demonstrate that the soul is mortal. Within this series the snake example belongs to a proof that is intended to show that because the soul is diffused throughout the whole body and, as a result, is structurally interconnected with the whole body, it is divided when the body is divided (3.634–6), and is therefore mortal (3.667–9). Within this proof, which also includes as supporting evidence the behaviour of limbs hacked off in battle (3.642–56), the *serpens discisa* serves as the climactic illustration, signalled by the introductory phrase *quin etiam*, which will persuade the reader that since the soul, along with the body, can be

Editions of Book 3:

Brown, P.M. (1997), *Lucretius: De Rerum Natura III*. Warminster.
Duff, J.D. (1903), *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Liber Tertius*. Cambridge.
Heinze, R. (1897), *T. Lucretius Carus De Rerum Natura, Buch III*. Leipzig.
Kenney, E.J. (1971), *Lucretius. De Rerum Natura Book III*. Cambridge.

I usually cite the earliest printing of an edition, when available to me, despite reprints with revisions and other improvements, except in cases where an editor has had second, or even third, thoughts about the wording of 3.658 (e.g. Bailey [1900] *truncum*, [1922$^2$] +*utrumque* +, [1947] *utrumque*). The text of the *De rerum nat.* is quoted from Smith; manuscript readings are taken from Diels. Fragments of Latin poetry are cited from J. Soubiran, *Cicéron. Aratea, Fragments Poétiques* (Paris, 1993$^2$); E. Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* (Oxford, 2003$^2$); A. Hollis, *Fragments of Roman Poetry c. 60 BC–AD 20* (Oxford, 2007); and J. Blänsdorf, *Fragmenta Poetarum Latinorum* (Berlin and New York, 2011). The paper's title comes from the comment of Giussani (vol. 3, p. 80) on 3.655 ff.: 'Anche la costruzione è serpentina.'

[2] Lachmann's *micanti* was adopted by Munro (1864), Brieger, Giussani, Heinze, Bailey (1900) and Duff; it later fell out of favour with editors and is not even mentioned in the apparatus of Flores. A reconsideration of its merits is in order. It is corroborated by descriptions of the tail's movement in Nic. *Ther*. 229 (σκωλύπεται) and 476 (μαστίζων) and in Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.1402 (σκαίρεσκεν). In Latin we find references to the tail's lashing (Ov. *Met*. 3.94 *flagellari*; and Stat. *Theb*. 5.538 *uerbere*). Even if these verbs, with the exception of σκαίρεσκεν, denote movement more violent than *micare*, they still represent movement of the same type. Cf. also Cic. *Marius* fr. 3.4, [*anguem*] *micantem* (Soubiran p. 249 = Courtney fr. 17.4, p. 175 = Blänsdorf fr. 20.4, p. 166). At German. *Arat.* 592–93, *anguis* | *ultima cauda micat*, it seems unlikely that anything more is meant than 'gleams', of starlight, although the combination is suggestive. Above all, *micanti* denotes movement, indicating the presence of the *anima*; see the comments of Brown on 657–660; it also suggests the movement of the tail after, as well as before, being cut; cf. Enn. *Ann*. 483–4 Sk., a severed head, and Verg. *Aen*. 10.396, the fingers of a severed hand; *minanti*, in this context, is imprecise by comparison. Emphasis on the snake's length and movement in the description, as I will explain later on, contributes much more to the proof than the detail of a threatening posture. The verb *minari* would properly be used of the head and forepart of the snake when upraised and poised to strike (Verg. *G*. 3.421), for that is where the threat exists; compare Sil. *Pun*. 6.278. The attempt to interpret *minanti* as meaning 'raised up and menacing', with a reference to Verg. *Aen*. 1.161–2, *uastae rupes geminique minantur* | *in caelum scopuli* (Ernout–Robin, Bailey [1947]) overlooks the fact that in the Virgil passage the perspective is that of an observer who sees something looming far overhead. Our snake's tail, presumably, is not that long. In addition to the explanations found in the commentaries, *minanti* is defended by D.S. Barrett, 'Lucretius' snake, *DRN* 3.757–9', *LCM* 15 (1990), 144 and K. Wellesley, 'Lucretius' snake dissected', *LCM* 16 (1991), 41–2, who adopts Pius's conjecture *minantis* modifying *serpentis*.

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divided into pieces, the soul is therefore mortal, according to the principle that what can be divided must be mortal (3.640–1). Even more effectively than the immediately preceding passage (3.642–56), in which the poet graphically depicts how human limbs and the head show signs of *uitalis sensus* after they have been lopped off, the cutting up of the snake brings home the point that the soul is coextensive with the body and an integral part of it because the one snake is divided into many writhing pieces, each with a portion of its *anima*, which continue to exhibit behaviour characteristic of the intact snake. Thus it provides multiple proofs, so to speak, that the soul is divided together with the body, since the many writhing parts of the snake's body (*in multas partis*, 3.659) reveal that its soul has been cut into many parts (*in multas … partis*, 3.669), whereas in the human examples there is a limit of just two pieces, the severed appendage and the body. Moreover, the human appendages show modest signs of the continued presence of the *anima* as they lie on the ground; a limb quivers (3.642–3), toes twitch (3.652–3), and a severed head keeps its eyes open (3.654–6). But the snake's instinct to attack and bite, even after it has been cut into pieces, now directed against itself, gives a startling illustration of the vital presence of *anima*.

The mutilation of the snake provides compelling evidence that the soul and the body form an interconnected structural complex. The verbal complex, however, in which this *serpens* is articulated, has long been a problematic one. At the heart of the problem is the meaning of *serpentis utrumque*, a phrase which has been treated with considerable indulgence and is printed in the majority of twentieth-century editions, though it does not yield a satisfactory sense.[4] It is usually interpreted to mean 'both parts of a snake', as if *utrumque serpentis* were equivalent in meaning to *utramque partem serpentis.* The word 'parts,' however, is an evasion of the semantic value of *utrumque* because it eliminates the ambiguity, in this context, of the pronoun 'each of two,' the reference of which should be made clear by the context, and supplies instead the very thing that is in question here, a clearly defined object, 'both parts,' for *discidere*. This may seem a small point but 'both parts' greatly obscures the nature of the problem. If we take a more literal approach to *utrumque*, we will get a better sense of the frustrated linguistic expectation caused by the pronoun: 'of a snake with a darting tongue,

[3] My translation is based on those of Bailey (1947) and Smith. In 662 *ipsam* is generally taken as modifying *se* but this interpretation runs counter to standard usage. In the intensifying combination of a form of *ipse* and the reflexive pronoun, the form of *ipse* normally modifies the subject of the verb, not the object, to emphasize that the subject is acting upon itself in an unusual or unexpected way. Here *ipsam* modifies *partem* the subject of *petere* and represents *ipsa* of the direct statement *ipsa … pars … prior*. Compare 4.639 [*serpens*] *sese mandendo conficit ipsa*. In 663 Kenney rightly points out that *morsu premat* means 'bite', with the reflexive understood as direct object, not 'assuage' its pain, as it is sometimes translated; see also Heinze on 663. The poet's language seems to express a grim satisfaction at the snake's pain; *uolneris ardenti … icta dolore* might describe a human victim of a snake's bite.

[4] *utrumque* is printed in Merrill (1907) and (1917), Diels, Ernout, Martin, Bailey (1947), Valentí, Orth, Büchner and Smith; and now it has a foothold in the twenty-first century in Flores. With the notable exception of Heinze, who printed *utrumque*, most nineteenth-century editors after Lachmann followed him in replacing it with conjectures (Bernays, Brieger, Giussani and Bailey [1900]). Heinze cautiously conjectured *utramque* in the apparatus, meaning *utramque partem*, on the hypothesis that lines 642–56 on the wounds inflicted by scythe-bearing chariots were a later addition by the poet and that, in the passage's original form, the meaning of the conjectured *utramque*, coming six lines after *partem … utramque* in 637, would have been clear. The hypothesis of an original structure in which line 641 was immediately followed by line 657 and the assumption that *utramque* can mean *utramque partem* still leave unexplained what parts are identified by that word and why these parts are specified before the division.

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quivering tail, long body, to cut up each of the two'. The question immediately arises: to what does 'each of the two' refer?[5] According to the normal usage of *uterque* the answer should be apparent. In 3.658 it is not. It has long been assumed that *utrumque* refers to *cauda* and *corpore* but such a reference is not at all clear from the syntax. In the description of the snake we do not find, and this is the essential point, two clearly defined components of the snake to which *utrumque* ('each of the two') can refer in accordance with its meaning and the syntax of the sentence.[6] Instead, we find three components, expressed in three parallel ablative phrases, *uibrante lingua*, *micanti cauda* and *procero corpore*, all of equal importance in delineating the snake.[7] And since the whole construction is dependent on one verb, *discidere*, the normal expectation would be that, whatever words are the antecedent of *utrumque*, those words would be in the accusative as well; the shift from *cauda* and *corpore* in the ablative to *utrumque* in the accusative, in what is essentially an appositional relationship, is syntactically jarring.

Furthermore, even if we assume for the sake of argument that *cauda* and *corpore* are the two components of the snake referred to by *utrumque*, we are confronted with an extremely awkward construction in which *utrumque* in the accusative is referring back to two nouns in the ablative and all three are governed by the same verb. In this syntactic environment *utrumque* is essentially a bizarre tautology, i.e. the specification of parts already specified, for *caudam* and *corpus*, the accusatives one would certainly expect if the poet did in fact want to single out these two anatomical features for

[5] The translation 'each of the two', rather than 'both parts' is intended to preserve the pronominal function of the word and to bring out the abruptness of the shift, in both sense and grammar, from three nouns in the ablative specified as attributes of the snake to a pronoun in the accusative denoting two of those attributes and functioning as the object of *discidere*. There is no evidence that *utrumque* can mean *utramque partem*, a meaning which misleadingly clarifies the reference of the pronoun by substituting the general term 'parts' for the two things denoted by 'both', whatever they may be.

[6] When there is a genitive dependent on a form of the pronoun *uterque*, it is a normally a demonstrative pronoun, or relative pronoun, which may be accompanied by its antecedent in the same case, or, much less often, a noun; the genitive expresses the two things referred to by *utrumque*; e.g. *utrumque eorum*, 'each of these two', i.e. *animus* and *anima* (3.421); cf. *quorum utrumque* (1.758, 975, 2.565, 5.1101, 6.365). The phrase *serpentis utrumque* is highly unusual because the genitive expresses not the two things referred to by *utrumque* but to their source, 'each of the two [i.e. tail and body] of the snake.' The oddity of *serpentis utrumque* lies in the combination of a pronoun with a noun in the genitive that is properly part of the pronoun's own antecedent; if *utrumque* refers to the tail and body of the snake, then *serpentis* properly belongs with *cauda* and *corpore*, not with *utrumque*. The normal form of expression would be *serpentis micantem caudam et procerum corpus utrumque discidere*; here *utrumque* is in apposition to *caudam* and *corpus*. Lucretius uses a similar construction at 3.472 and 6.499. Apart from *utrumque* in 3.658, the only other problematic occurrence of the word is *utraque* in 6.517–18: *sed uemens imber fit, ubi uementer utraque | nubila ui cumulata premuntur et impete uenti*; for different views see Lachmann, Munro (1886[4]), and Bailey (1947). My own view is that *utraque* refers to *ui* and *impete uenti*, with *utraque* attracted into the gender of the nearer noun; *ui* itself means the pressure exerted by the clouds on themselves when massed together, a phenomenon described at 6.510–12 where that pressure and the wind's onslaught are identified as the two causes (*dupliciter* 510) of rain (cf. 6.734). I translate 'when the clouds, after massing together, are violently pressed by each one, their own force and the wind's onslaught'.

[7] It is sometimes suggested that *utrumque* at 3.668 and *partem utramque* at 3.637 are parallels that support the use of *utrumque* in 3.658; see Ernout and Robin and Smith. Neither one is relevant to the problem. The meaning of *utrumque* at 3.668 is unmistakably clear. In 667–8 the poet twice mentions *anima* and *corpus*; when he concludes in 668 that 'each one of the two' (*utrumque*) must be thought to be mortal, the reference of *utrumque* is clear and precise, i.e. *anima* and *corpus*. In 3.633–9 Lucretius uses the adjective, not the pronoun. He refers to the two parts of a body that has been cut in half (*medium*, 3.636) as *partem utramque* (637); one body, divided at the middle, yields two parts. The poet's clarity of expression in these instances only highlights the obscurity of *serpentis utrumque*.

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cutting. One might as well say: *canis rostro procero, uibranti cauda, uilloso corpore utrumque permulcere*.[8]

In addition to the objections already presented, *utrumque* is inappropriate to the poet's argument. The series of descriptive ablatives is not an enumeration of parts that divides the snake into two segments, whether they be thought of as *cauda* and *corpus*, or *cauda* and *caput* (if *lingua* is standing in for that part of the snake's anatomy), or *corpus* and *caput*; rather, the ablatives depict a snake that exhibits through its movement the presence of its *anima* (*uibrante*, *micanti*) and underscore, in their steady accumulation culminating in the six syllables of *procero corpore*, the impressive length of the snake extending over two lines.[9] The picture presented by the poet is that of a long snake that has movement, not one divided into two parts, which will then be cut into many parts. As Kenney rightly observes in his commentary, there is little sense in having a two-stage division, indicated first by *utrumque* and then by *in multas partis*, since, in order to make his point most effectively, the poet should emphasize the division of a whole into many pieces in a single stage.

A new twist was added to the interpretation of *serpentis utrumque* by Diels in his translation of the poem. In his view *utrumque* refers to the snake's body and soul ('Beides, den Lieb wie die Seele'). Diels's interpretation was subsequently defended by Nicoll who emphasized that the passage itself, with its examples of the soul being cut away with parts of the body, naturally points in that direction. This view, however, results, as Nicoll himself was aware, in a conspicuous *petitio principii*; for the conclusion that portions of the *anima* are cut away along with portions of the body is incorporated into the premise of the example, namely cutting into pieces the body and soul of a snake. With Diels' interpretation the poet is saying that if one cuts up the body and soul of a snake, then its soul is divided along with the body. The conclusion, however, that the soul is also being cut into pieces along with the body is what the poet seeks to demonstrate and cannot be assumed at the outset. In order to reach that conclusion the demonstration requires the description of the behaviour of the individual pieces because, after the snake has been cut up, the movements of the individual pieces indicate the presence of the *anima* in those pieces. To say at the outset that both body and soul are being cut up is to undermine seriously the logic of the proof. Moreover, the verbal parallelism, invoked by Nicoll, of *utrumque* and *in multas partis* in 668–9 does not help to elucidate the meaning of *utrumque* in 658 since, as was mentioned earlier, *utrumque* in 668 clearly refers to *anima* and *corpus*, which are both mentioned in 666–8, while *utrumque* in 658 has no such reference in its vicinity.

The evidence of meaning, usage and the logic of the argument shows that *utrumque* is indefensible. Out of respect for the Latin language and Lucretius's poetry editors who will stubbornly persist in printing it must do so by obelizing it.

[8] Munro (1886[4]), alone among supporters of *utrumque*, recognized the inconcinnity of the genitive *serpentis* dependent on *utrumque*. In his translation he treats the ablative phrases as an ablative absolute construction with *serpentis* dependent on *lingua*, and, by extension, on *cauda* and *corpore* as well, to which *utrumque* refers. Although this solution creates problems of its own, it does show a regard for the proper use of the pronoun *utrumque*. In his text Munro adopted a different solution, positing a lacuna after 658 and offering the following supplement in the apparatus, *et caudam et molem totius corporis omnem*, which neatly provides a clear reference for *utrumque*. One may find this a radical solution but that does not diminish its value for showing that *utrumque* stands in need of clarification; it also shows how *utrumque* creates tautology of expression. Munro's successors have failed to appreciate the diagnostic importance of his proposal.

[9] Since the point to be proved is that the *anima*, diffused throughout the whole body, undergoes division with it, the proof begins with strong emphasis on the wholeness of what is to be divided (3.634 *toto corpore*, 3.635 *totum esse animale*).

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Numerous attempts have been made to supply a direct object for *discidere* other than the transmitted *utrumque*, all of which, with one exception, are open to the objection that they specify a part of the snake rather than the indispensably whole *serpens* required by the logic of the proof. The one exception is *serpentem*, printed by Candidus[10] and attributed to Marullus.[11] It is astonishing that the convincing result of so slight a change should have had such a negligible impact on the editorial tradition.[12] *Serpentem* supplies the much needed and undivided direct object of *discidere*, restores proper emphasis to the description of the snake by directing attention to the animate creature itself, and opens the way for dealing with the corrupt *utrumque*. I will have more to say about *serpentem* later on. But first, since improbable conjectures have diverted the attention of critics for so long from the simplicity of this partial solution, it will be necessary to review the weaknesses of these various proposals. The results of that review will show just how indispensable *serpentem* is.

Perhaps the earliest attempt to replace *utrumque* as the object of *discidere* is *caudam*, a conjecture attributed by Lachmann to Avancius, editor of the first Aldine edition

[10] Candidus' text reads: *quin etiam tibi, si lingua uibrante minacem, | serpentem, et caudae procero corpore, utrinque* [*sic*]. Lachmann adopted in his text *serpentem* and *utrimque*, adding *micanti* (see n. 2 above) and *cauda e*, for *caude*, the reading of *O* before correction and *Q*. His version of 657–8 reads, *lingua vibrante, micanti | serpentem cauda, e procero corpore utrimque*, which he interpreted as follows: *utrimque e procero corpore, id est ex utraque parte, lingua vibrat, micat cauda*, i.e. a snake with a darting tongue and a quivering tail at each end of its long body. The weakness of *utrimque*, construed with the prepositional phrase *e procero corpore*, lies in the superfluous detail of specifying the location of the tongue at one end of the body and the tail at the other end; the poet's use of *lingua* and *cauda* makes the disposition of parts perfectly clear. In Lachmann's version the poet fussily specifies that the flickering tongue is found at one end of the snake and the darting tail at the other. Needless to say, too high a price is paid to retain a form of *uterque*. *Vtrimque* merely repeats, in adverbial form, the problem of *utrumque*. Those who follow Lachmann in reading *e procero corpore* but retain the transmitted *utrumque* interpret the prepositional phrase differently. Munro (1864) takes it with *micanti*: 'as its tail is darting out from its long body'; W.A. Merrill, 'Notes on Lucretius', *UCPCP* 3 (1918), 265–316, at 292 regards it as an ablative of separation: 'Both ends of the snake are chopped from the long body'; likewise W. Richter, *Textstudien zu Lukrez* (Munich, 1974), 49–50, who makes it dependent on his conjecture, *caudam … truncam*, i.e. the tail cut away from the body.

[11] The attribution of conjectures on the *De rerum nat*. to Marullus, primarily on the evidence of Candidus, has been called into question because his conjectures have been found in the marginalia or interlinear notes of certain manuscripts that are not directly linked to Marullus by any written *testimonia* in the books themselves, such as an owner's inscription testifying to Marullus as the source of the marginalia, and, further, these marginalia and interlinear notes are said to antedate the period of Marullus's work on the text of Lucretius and therefore cannot be his property; see Flores, vol. 1, 'Introduzione', 10–14 and vol. 3, 'Introduzione', 13–16. Flores, who has eliminated the name of Marullus from the apparatus, assigns both *serpentem* and *utrimque* to the marginalia of two manuscripts, *Laurent*. 35.25, written before 1450 (D), and *Monac*. *Lat*. 816, written before 1475 (I), and to the text of a third, *Ambros*. P 19 *sup*., written after 1475 (Ea). See also M.D. Reeve, 'The Italian tradition of Lucretius', *IMU* 23 (1980), 27–48, at 44–8, and 'Lucretius from the 1460s to the 17th century: seven questions of attribution', *Aevum* 80 (2006), 165–84, at 169–71. More recently, however, A. Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2010), 113–22 has attributed the corrections in *Laurent*. 35.25 and *Monac*. *Lat*. 816 to Marullus. Important questions concerning the identification of the hand in which the marginalia are written and the date when they were entered into these manuscripts remain to be settled before there can be a definite determination that they are the intellectual property of someone other than Marullus. In my view, for the purpose of understanding the impact of the conjectures *serpentem* and *utrimque* on the editorial tradition of the poem, the most useful historical statement that can be made is to attribute both to the primary agent of their diffusion among readers of the poem, i.e. the edition of Candidus 1512, where they make their first appearance in print.

[12] Editions published after Lachmann with *serpentem* and *utrimque*, Bernays and Brown: with *serpentem*, Kenney, who obelizes *utrumque*, and Müller, who prints in the text his conjecture *toruum* for

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(Venice, 1500).[13] *Caudam* was adopted by Lambinus, along with the additional changes of *minanti* to Pius's *minantis* and of *utrumque* to *utrinque* (Candidus): *minantis | serpentis caudam, procero corpore, utrinque*. As Lambinus explains in his commentary, *procero corpore* is an ablative of description dependent on *caudam*, i.e., *caudam procero corpore = caudam proceram*. The 'long-bodied tail' of a snake is a bit of an anatomical puzzle and does not provide a persuasive substitute for the whole creature that is to be divided into many parts.[14]

Another possibility for a direct object in 658 was suggested by E. Goebel who changed *procero corpore* into *procerum corpus*: *minanti | serpentis cauda procerum corpus utrimque*.[15] Goebel's conjecture provides a better direct object than *caudam* but it spoils the parallelism of the asyndetic series of ablative phrases; by making *procerum corpus* the salient feature, the details of darting tongue and quivering tail appear to be an afterthought to the length of the body. Moreover, *utrimque*, meaning 'at each end' is a rather odd specification in connection with *procerum corpus*. It suggests that the snake is not in fact to be cut along its entire length but rather in the area of the tail and the head.

Two other attempts were made to specify what part of the snake is to be cut up. Both attempts are modifications of a solution first proposed by A. Brieger, who introduced the noun *truncus*, destined to be popular as noun or adjective among Lucretian critics, into the repertoire of conjectures for *utrumque*. Brieger, although he followed Lachmann in reading *serpentem*, reacted against his changes to the remainder of the line, regarding them as a needless complication of an already difficult passage, intelligible only with the help of his commentary. Brieger rewrote the line as follows: *micanti | serpentem cauda, procero corpori' trunco*; at the same time he suggested that *serpentis* could be interpreted as an accusative plural, indicating that the experiment could be repeated.[16] The noun *truncus* is a strange word to use of a limbless creature and does not belong to the vocabulary of poetic descriptions of snakes; it will at best serve to differentiate the body of the snake from the head but beyond that it is not a useful term to specify a segment of a long cylindrical body. Stranger still is the phrase *procero corpori' trunco* as a periphrasis for *procero corpore*. Why the specification *truncus*? And what is gained by

*utrumque* and records in the apparatus a second suggestion, *taetrum*; both conjectures strike me as purely ornamental epithets in this context since neither the snake's savage disposition nor repellent aspect is in point here but rather the length and movements of the snake's body. Müller's conjectures raise the question of the gender of *serpens*. At 4.60 and 4.638 *serpens* is unambiguously feminine; at 5.33, *asper, acerba tuens, immani corpore serpens*, it is unambiguously masculine. In the case of Müller's *toruum*, it could just as well be *toruam*, since there is no clear sign of the gender in the passage, unless *icta* in 663 is taken to refer to the snake rather than specifically to *priorem partem* in 662.

[13] Modern editors attribute *caudam* to Lambinus; Lambinus himself says that he found it in certain manuscripts and printed editions.

[14] *Caudam* as object of *discidere* was revived by A. Kannengiesser (review of Nencini [n. 19 below], *BPhW* 15 [1895], 1132–4, at 1134): *minanti | serpenti caudam e procero corpori' trunco*; similar is the proposal of L.A. MacKay, 'Notes on Lucretius', *UCPCP* 13 (1950), 433–45, at 440–1: *minanti | serpenti caudam e procero corpore truncam*; W. Richter's proposal (n. 10 above, 48–50) essentially repeats MacKay's: *minantis | serpentis caudam e procero corpore truncam*. On the shortcomings of Richter's solution see the review of E.J. Kenney, *CR* 26 (1976), 180–1, at 181. The appearance of the adjective *truncus* in all three of these proposed solutions represents a modification of a suggestion first made by A. Brieger, on which see below.

[15] *Quaestiones Lucretianae* (Salzburg, 1857), 25.

[16] F. Susemihl and A. Brieger, 'Bemerkungen zum dritten Buche des Lucretius', *Philologus* 27 (1868), 28–57, at 50–1. Bockemüller appears to be the only editor who reads *serpentes* as the object of *discidere*.

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describing the snake in this way? Brieger explains that *truncus* means the body in contrast to the head and the tail. But that meaning is already clearly conveyed by *corpus*. This pedantic articulation of the *serpens* spoils the effect of the poet's description by turning it into an anatomical chart: *caput*, *truncus*, *cauda*. Lucretius presents the reader with a snake that is long and full of movement. In addition, *trunco*, in the company of *procero corpori*', almost seems an oxymoron; it suggests a particular segment when the image is one of full length. In the bloody arena of serial dismemberment and mutilation in this group of proofs, *truncus* will immediately connote that the snake has already in some way been truncated.[17]

F. Susemihl, Brieger's co-author, offered, with considerable hesitancy, a modified version of Brieger's conjecture in a note appended to their paper. He turned *procero corpori*' *trunco* into the direct object of *discidere*, *procerum corpori*' *truncum*.[18] The same objections to Brieger's proposal, i.e. a periphrasis for a meaning that is already clearly expressed and a premature truncation of the body, apply here as well, with the added difficulty of the contorted double genitive, *serpentis* and *corporis*, one of which is accompanied by two ablatives of description, 'the long trunk of the body of a snake with a darting tongue and quivering tail'.

And finally, yet another twist on the snake's *truncus* was devised by C. Giussani; he introduced one change into the line, *truncum* for *utrumque*, reading *micanti* | *serpentis cauda, procero corpore truncum*. The only improvement here, if one can call it an improvement, over the proposals of Brieger and Susemihl, is that Giussani's *truncum* involves fewer changes to the transmitted text. In terms of sense, however, the reader is once again confronted with a conjecture that specifies a part of the snake, whatever part the ambiguous *truncus* may denote, rather than the whole it.[19]

The most serious shortcoming of all the proposals discussed above is that they are far surpassed by *serpentem* printed by Candidus; it produces excellent sense, it is a very economical correction, and it focusses critical attention where it belongs, on the corrupt *utrumque*. Adopting *serpentem* as direct object of *discidere*, I base the following discussion on three hypotheses: (1) As Munro (1860) observed, *utrumque* is an error that crept into the text from 3.637 or 668; in both places the word occurs in proximity to *corpore* (639 and 665). Therefore the *ductus litterarum* is of no help in finding a solution.[20] (2) When *utrumque* displaced the genuine word at the end of the line, the original reading *serpentem* was altered to *serpentis* to restore sense since *utrumque* was now taken to be the object of *discidere*. (3) The word displaced by *utrumque* can be recovered from descriptions of snakes in hexameter poetry, a source of evidence that has been underutilized in the analysis of the Lucretian snake.

[17] Cf. 3.654 *calido uiuenteque trunco*; see also 3.404.

[18] Susemihl and Brieger (n. 16), 57 n. 21.

[19] More ambitious versions of the line have been proposed. Wellesley (n. 2), 41–2, working on the assumption that the poet was describing a snake with its forepart upraised, rewrote the line as follows: *minantis* | *serpentis scandens procero corpore dorsum*. Working with a similar image of the snake's upraised posture, F. Nencini, 'Emendationum Lucretianarum Spicilegium', *SIFC* 3 (1895), 205–24, at 216–17 combined conjecture with a convoluted construction of the Latin: *minenti serpenti cauda e procero corpore utrumque*. A. Savic Rebac, 'Lucretiana', *Ziva Antika* 1 (1951), 102–9, at 106–7 proposed the unmetrical *minanti* | *serpens it cauda procero corpore unumque*. The complexity of these proposals underscores the syntactic clarity and simplicity achieved by reading *serpentem*.

[20] It may not be too far afield to suggest that the pair of famous snakes at Verg. *Aen*. 2.214, *serpens … uterque*, exercised a surreptitiously corrupting influence on the wording of the line as well.

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The first example comes from Virgil's *Georgics* where we find an articulation of the snake according to three anatomical features, a head (*caput*), a coiling body (*nexus*), and a tail (*cauda*). Here is the poet's description of the poisonous *coluber* as it retreats from the shepherd's attack into a hiding place (*G.* 3.422–4):

> iamque fuga timidum caput abdidit alte,
> cum medii nexus extremaeque agmina caudae
> soluuntur, tardosque trahit sinus ultimus orbis.

The passage, with its emphasis on sinuous movement (*nexus*, *soluuntur*, *sinus*, *orbis*), highlights an essential characteristic that is missing from the transmitted text of 3.657–8, the coiling of the snake's body. After all, what is the hexameter snake without reference to its coils? To take a poet who was Lucretius's older contemporary, Marcus Cicero, in his translation of Aratus's *Phaenomena*, a poem with which Lucretius was familiar, describes how the constellation Ophiuchus grips a massive snake while he himself is entwined in the coils of its body (*corpore torto*):

> Hic [Ophiuchus] pressu duplici palmarum continet Anguem
> atque eius ipse manet religatus corpore torto.
> (*Aratea* fr. 15.1–2, Soubiran p. 161)

In two other translations, taken from Greek tragedies, Cicero introduces the detail of the coils, not found in the source texts, to enhance the fearsome aspect of a snake or serpent-monster. In his version of *Il.* 2.299–330 Cicero expands Odysseus' description of the snake that devours nine nestlings and their mother, a portent that signifies the length of the war at Troy (*Il.* 2.308–320), by adding that the creature was 'terrifying with its coil' (*tortuque draconem | terribilem*, 11–12, Soubiran p. 266). Likewise in his version of Sophocles, *Trachiniae* 1046–102, where Hercules lists the creatures he vanquished, the serpent, described in the Greek simply as 'the guardian of the golden apples', becomes in Latin 'a serpent with multiple coils' (42–3 *tortu multiplicabili | draconem*, Soubiran p. 275).[21]

In this group of parallels the phrase *corpore torto* stands out for its sound pattern, which seems to have commended itself to the poets for its threefold repetition of the syllable '*-or-*', perhaps regarded as imitative of a snake's coiling, sinuous movement. Manilius does Cicero one better in his description of the snake held by Ophiuchus, juxtaposing references to the bodies of the snake and Ophiuchus to emphasize how the two figures are entwined:

> serpentem magnis Ophiuchus nomine gyris
> diuidit et torto cingentem corpore corpus.[22] (*Astr.* 1.331–2)

[21] Additional examples of the coiling snake in poetry, celestial or terrestrial, expressed with the verb *torqueo* or the noun *tortus* are found in Cicero, [*anguem*] *intorquentem* (*Marius* 3.5, Soubiran p. 249; Courtney fr. 17, p. 175; Blänsdorf[4] fr. 20, p. 166); Quintus Cicero, on the zodiacal constellations 17, *squama … torta Draconis* (Courtney p. 179, Blänsdorf[4] p. 185); Catullus 64.258 *tortis serpentibus*; Varro Atacinus, *torta … angue* (Courtney fr. 23, p. 253 = Hollis fr. 130. p. 176 = Blänsdorf[4] fr. 9, p. 235); Verg. *G.* 3.38 *tortos Ixionis anguis*, *Aen.* 5.276 *longos … tortus*, 12.481; Hor. *Carm.* 2.13.35–6 *intorti … angues*; Ov. *Her.* 12.102 *torto pectore*, *Met.* 2.138 *tortum … ad Anguem*, 3.42 *orbes torquet*, 4.483 *tortoque angue*; German. *Arat.* 593 *tortus … timendos*; *Aetna* 46–7 *per orbes … intortos*, Sen. *Med.* 961–2 *anguis … tortus*.

[22] The text is quoted from G.P. Goold, *M. Manilii Astronomica* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1998[2]).

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Here we have a fourfold repetition of the '*-or-*'syllable. In *Aen.* 5.276 Virgil uses the noun *tortus*, rather than the participle of *torqueo*, together with *corpore*, to achieve the same sound effect: *serpens longos fugiens dat corpore tortus*. And Ovid, in a variation on the phrase, speaks of the 'coiling breast'[23] (*Her.* 12.102 *torto pectore*) of the serpent that guarded the golden fleece.

It follows from these examples of 'coiling' as a formulaic element in the description of snakes that the *serpens* in 3.658 has 'a long, coiling body', *procero corpore torto*:[24]

> quin etiam tibi si lingua uibrante micanti
> serpentem cauda procero corpore torto …

The image is that of a snake with a darting tongue, quivering tail and a long body that moves with a winding motion; a live snake would not be a stationary target for its human assailant. The double epithet, *procero* and *torto*, consisting of an adjective and participle, is very much in Lucretius' manner.[25] Here then are the features one would expect in the delineation of the *serpens* before it is chopped up into many pieces. The poet directs attention first to the darting tongue, then to the quivering tail and then to the long, coiling body. And for each element he specifies the type of movement characteristic of it (*uibrante*, *micanti* and *torto*), a detail which will be of special importance after the snake has been cut into pieces because the focus on the movements of its body before division highlights the movements of its parts after division. Thus the emendation *torto* provides a characteristic of the snake's movement that is regularly found in poetry and results in a sound pattern that has been identified as one favoured by the poets in such descriptions; in addition, the verb *tortari* in 661 will now not only be an echo of *torto* in 658, it will also be evidence that the pieces of the snake continue its natural form of movement (*corpore torto*) and must therefore contain a piece of its *anima* since the *anima* is the source of motion.[26]

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In 332 *torto* is Scaliger's certain emendation for the transmitted *toto*; see A.E. Housman's note in *M. Manilii Astronomicon Liber I* (Cambridge, 1937[2]).

[23] See n. 24.

[24] Since the perfect passive participle *torto* is here used as an attributive adjective it can be taken as the equivalent in meaning of a present intransitive participle, i.e. 'coiling' or 'winding' rather than 'having been coiled'. Lucretius has the same usage at 1.293 *uertice torto*, 'whirling eddy', which is followed by a synonymous phrase in 294 with a present participle, *rotanti turbine*; cf. Verg. *Aen*. 7.567, *torto uertice*. In four of the passages cited above in n. 21 the perfect participle *tortus* clearly functions as a present: the fragment from Varro Atacinus, Ov. *Her*. 12.102, *Met*. 4.483, and Sen. *Med.* 961–2; similarly *intortus* at Hor. *Carm*. 2.13.35–6 and *Aetna* 46–7. In the passages quoted above from Cicero's *Aratea*, fr. xv.1–2 and Manilius, 1.331–2, *torto* is a true perfect passive participle.

[25] See the collection of examples in Munro (1886[4]), on 1.258 and 5.13.

[26] In 661–3 the sound pattern of the '*-or-*' syllable continues to underscore the snake's sinuous movement after it has been cut up: *sor-*, *tor-*, *or-*, *-or-*, *mor-* and *-or-*. The material presented in this paper will suggest other possibilities for conjecture. One such possibility is the participle *tortam/-um* in agreement with *serpentem*; the result is similar in sense to *torto* in agreement with *corpore*. In my view, however, *tortam/-um* interrupts the syntactic momentum of the three ablatives of description, in each of which, if *torto* is read, a participle describes a type of movement appropriate to each part of the snake as it is mentioned, *lingua uibrante*, *micanti cauda* and *procero corpore torto*. Another possibility is to retain the transmitted *serpentis* and read the noun *tortus*, either in the accusative singular *tortum* or the accusative plural *tortus*. The shortcoming of this approach is that the specification of the coils as the object of *discidere* again results in an expression that substitutes a part of the snake for the whole. I want to thank the editor, Bruce Gibson, and the anonymous reader for comments, criticisms and corrections that led to the improvement of this paper.

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