

LUCRETIUS III. 961-962 ONCE MORE

In Book III 931 ff. of the *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius' personified Nature is presented lecturing an imaginary person (whose identity is not specified) on the necessity of dying and on the irrational grief felt by mortals at the thought of death. At l. 952 the mortal addressed to by Nature acquires at least one specific quality: he is an old man. This fact provides Nature's argumentation with an *a fortiori*: even if we supposed that Nature were willing to make allowances in the case of a younger man groaning at the thought of death, she would show herself uncompromising before an old man indulging in ludicrous lamentations for his approaching end, especially if his wretched past could not justify his desire to go on living. Nature's harangue ends with an exhortation at 961-962:

*nunc aliena tua tamen aetate omnia mitte
aequo animoque agendum magnis concede: necessest.*

This is what the MS. tradition offers¹, but *concede magnis* at 962 (= give up your place to the great) is meaningless and defies any attempt at interpretation. The difficulties are undoubtedly due to the adj. *magnis* (for what could *magnis* mean here?) which must, for that reason, be corrupt. Thus l. 962 confronts us with a much-discussed *locus desperatus* of Lucretian scholarship that has been vexing the minds of scholars for more than five hundred years.

Twenty-five attempts at emendation, from A.D. 1500 to 1960, are listed by J. P. Vallot²; some of them are dealt with by himself and some (before him) by A. Traina³. A brief survey, however, of the history of this famous *crux* will, hopefully, prove to be profitable.

Abbreviated references to periodicals follow the system of *L'Année Philologique*.

1. *O(blongus)* and *Q(uadratus)*, the names given by Lachmann to these two major sources of the Lucretian text, exhibit at 962 *agendum* and *magnis*. *Agedum* is the correction of *L(aurentianus)*, adopted by the majority of scholars.

2. See *Miscellanea critica*, ed. J. Irmscher, II (1965) 365-369.

3. *Maia* 5 (1952) 284-287.

Marullus, followed by Avantius¹ (1500), suggests *iam aliis*, which C. Bailey² rejects as «metrically awkward and feeble in sense»; moreover, the corruption cannot easily be explained palaeographically³. C. Lachmann⁴ prefers *dignis* but his suggestion has not won any favour. S. Brandt's⁵ *gnavis* (=give up your place to active or industrious people) has its origin at 956. R. G. Bury's⁶ *Maccus*, an equivalent of the voc. *baratre*⁷ at 955, is highly improbable and has justly been disregarded. R. Heinze⁸ puts a *crux*, but inclines towards Marullus' *iam aliis*. W. A. Merrill⁹ moves gradually from *monitus* («you have your warning») through *age: iam dormis* («you are already in the sleep of death»), which from the point of view of sense and palaeography is hardly tenable, towards *age: numne gemis?*, not, I think, more probable than *iam dormis*. Furthermore, these last two proposals involve an undesirable change of *agedum*. M. Schuster¹⁰ argues in favour of *gnaris* («die Klugen,

1. See Vallot, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

2. Cf. *De Rerum Natura libri sex, Edited with Prolegomena, Critical Apparatus, Translation and Commentary* by C. Bailey, Oxford 1947, Vol. II, *ad loc.*

See especially K. Müller, *MII* 33 (1976) 226: «Tatsächlich ist die Elision einsilbiger Wörter in der daktylischen Dichtung allgemein unbeliebt... Von den nicht ganz 130 *iam* im Lukreztext sind nur 2 (d.h. etwa 1.5%) elidiert (4.1180 und 6.8), und zwar beidemale nicht vor einer Kürze. Es ist also zuzugeben, dass Marullus' Konjektur *iam aliis* in metrischer Beziehung wenig elegant ist».

3. Cf. L. Castiglioni, *Acme* 2 (1949) 7: «Manca piuttosto la verosimiglianza esterna, che dia la ragione della corruzione: da *iam aliis* a *magnis* non si arriva se non attraverso un duplice stadio e questo rende meno probabile la correzione».

4. T. Lucreti Cari, *De Rerum Natura, libri sex*, Car. Lachmannus recensuit et emendavit, Berolini 1871, *ad loc.* The emendation was made in his first edition of 1850 (see Vallot, p. 365).

5. *Jahrb. f. cl. Phil.* 121 (1880) 773.

6. *CR* 9 (1895) 156.

7. The reading of *O* and *Q* at 955 is *baratre* which is not universally accepted, other conjectures, besides *balatra*, being *barathrum*, *blatero*, *baratro*.

8. See T. Lucretius Carus, *De Rerum Natura, Buch III, erklärt von R. Heinze*, Leipzig 1897, *ad loc.*: «Was zu *concede* hinzugefügt war, weiss ich nicht... Von dem für *magnis* hier Vorgeslagenen—*magnus*, *Maccus*, *ad manis*, *mage sis*, *humanis*, *gnavis*, *gnatis*, *dignis*, *iam aliis*—ist das Meiste unmöglich, nichts überzeugend, das letzte noch das beste».

9. *AJPh* 21 (1900) 184-185.

10. See *WS* 52 (1934) 87: «Ich möchte unter Hinweis auf Horaz' *vivere si recte nescis, deede peritis* (*Epist.* II. II.213) ... meinen, Lukrez habe *gnaris* geschrieben, was zu *peritis* vollkommen parallel steht». This is approximately what V. Coulon

Verständigen») quoting Horace's *vivere si recte nescis, decede peritis* (*Epist.* II. II. 213). However, the absence in the Lucretian passage of the Horatian explicitness concerning the contrast between inexperience and experience tells against Schuster's proposal. J. Martin¹ retains the *magnis* of MSS., but changes *necessesit* to *necessis* (neut. plur.). R. Waltz's² *mactus* («allons! courage, cède la place!») is a wild theory. Waltz himself admits that *mactus* is absolutely unattested in this sense; I think also that the archaic and religious ring inherent in *mactus* is quite out of place here. *Iam annis*, Traina's³ conjecture, suffers from the same metrical disadvantage as Marullus' *iam aliis*. K. Büchner⁴ changes *magnis* to *validis* in order to establish a contrast between this and the idea of weakness expressed by *marcet* at 946 and *confecti languent* at 947, that is, some fifteen lines back. His dictum «nicht immer die Suche nach dem paläographisch Nächstliegenden zum Richtigen führt» cannot forestall protests against the palaeographical implausibility of *validis*. L. A. Mackay⁵ reads *ingratis* for *magnis* («come, now, resign yourself and go little as you like it; for go you must»), but a third foot caesura after the *in-* of *ingratis* is «a liberty not commendable in an emendation», as he himself puts it. More recently M. L. Clarke⁶, comparing Epict. *Diss.* IV. I. 106: οὐ πρῶτον ἀφ᾽ ἑστέων τῷ κρείττονι; proposed *mage dignis cede* for *magnis concede*. Serious objections have been raised by K. Müller⁷ against D. J. Lilley's⁸ *segnis* («get a move on, you who are reluctant to depart»), the last, as far as I know, attempt at emendation.

If we except conjectures that tamper with the words *agedum* and

[*RhM* 99 (1956) 246] says in arguing for *gnaris*, apparently without knowing that he had been anticipated by Schuster.

1. *T. Lucreti Cari, De Rerum Natura, libri sex, quintum recensuit* J. Martin, Lipsiae 1963. Martin made his proposal in his first edition of 1934, *quam non vidi*. For Martin's change of MSS. *necessesit* to *necessis*, see esp. Traina, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-285.

2. See *RPh* 25 (1951) 69: «Ce nominatif *mactus* ne se rencontre, à vrai dire, avec la même valeur dans aucun des textes que nous possédons». Cf. also the weighty criticisms of Traina, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-286.

3. *Op. cit.*, p. 287.

4. *Hermes* 84 (1956) 223-224.

5. *AJPh* 77 (1956) 63-64.

6. See *CR* 20 (1970) 9-10 and cf. E. J. Kenney, *Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, Book III*, Cambridge 1971, *ad loc.*

7. *Op. cit.*, pp. 221-225.

8. *RhM* 118 (1975) 191-192.

necesses, those remaining may be classified into two main categories: (a) Conjectures belonging to the first category have been put forward on the assumption that a dative is required with *concede* (*iam aliis, dignis, gnatis, humanis, gnavis, manis, necessis, gnaris, iam annis, validis*). However, it is unquestionable that *concede* may very well be used independently to mean «depart, retire, exit», and it is only gratuitously that some scholars have ruled out this alternative¹. Moreover, their choice of a dative in replacing the corrupt *magnis* was influenced by 964-965, where it is said that the expulsion of the old by the new is an inevitable law of nature; hence words such as *dignis, gnatis, gnavis* etc. describing individuals worthier or younger than the querulous old man. But we must not lose sight of the fact that 955-962 are exclusively about the old man and his irrational behaviour, with no one else participating in the scene; and what is of equal importance: at a closer examination of the thought-structure of the passage, one is inclined to understand that *enim* at 964, which refers to *iure*, introduces for the first time the reasons for Nature's exhortations at 962. Therefore, according to what has been said above, I fail to see the necessity of a dative with *concede*, and a dative containing the idea of succession at that. (b) In the conjectures of the second category, the corrupt *magnis* is substituted by a nominative which qualifies the person addressed to by Nature, i.e. the old man reluctant to depart from life (*Maccus, gnavus, manus, nactus*).

Other conjectures listed by Vallot (*op. cit.*, pp. 365-366) are:

gnatis: Bernays 1882 (Brieger, Giussani, Leonard and Smith)

humanis: Munro 1860 (A. D. Fitton Brown, W. R. Inge)

ad manis: Bockemuller 1873 (J. M. Burnam)

magnus: Munro 1873

gnavus: Nencini 1895

manus: Everett 1896

age: nunc annis: Merrill 1916 (Cinquini)

manis (dat.): Bignone 1933

age, nunc aliis: Tescari 1958 (Rose)

acidum vacuis: Orth 1960.

1. Cf. Plaut. *Amph.* 984: *Concedite atque abscedite omnes, de via decedite*; Verg. *Ecl.* 40.63: *ipsae rursus concedite silvae*; id. *Aen.* 8.40 f.: *neu belli terere minis; tumor omnis et irae / concessere deorum*. *Concedo* (with or without *vita*) is often used in the sense «to die». Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 4.38: *quandoque concessero*; id., *ib.* 13.30: *At I. Volusius egregia fama concessit, cui tres et nonaginta anni spatium vivendi praecipuaeque opes bonis artibus inoffensa tot imperatorum umicitia fuit*.

In *tanta silva coniecturarum* it is only with a sense of awe and with extreme caution that one should venture on a fresh approach to this *locus desperatus*. Furthermore, any attempt, if it is to avoid trodden paths that would inevitably lead to solutions more or less similar to those so far presented, must first put aside traditional and inveterate conceptions concerning the whole section from 955 to 962; this should entail a revaluation of the tenor of Nature's speech.

What can legitimately be deduced from what commentators say is that they regard 955-962 as a sustained tirade on Nature's part with reprobations and accusations against the old man, delivered from first to last in a severe tone and culminating in the injunction of 961-962: *nunc aliena... neessest*. 961 especially is translated on the (explicit or implicit) assumption that *aliena* refers to privileges or goods, which do not befit the senility of the mortal¹; but this is by no means certain. In what has preceded the old man has not been shown in firm possession of any goods at all (except, of course, that of life) which he must now give up. As a matter of fact, his life has been spent in a miserable, never satisfied covetousness (957-958) and now he is left only with his tears and grievances. It is exactly these *querelae* and *lacrimae* that are *aliena*, i.e. unbecoming to the dignity that should accompany his advanced age; it is these he is asked at 961 to give up (*mitte*)².

What has been said above about the meaning of *aliena* at 961 has an immediate bearing on the proper appreciation of the tone of 961-962. From 955 to 960 Nature had been harsh and inexorable, using words and expressions that conveyed her indignation at the old man's past

1. «But now in any case dismiss all that befits not your years, and be content» [Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, with an English Translation by W. H. D. Rouse, London-Cambridge, Mass. 1937 (Loeb Classical Library)].

«Yet now give up all these things so ill-fitted for thy years, and with calm mind, come, yield them to thy sons: for so thou must». (Bailey, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 351).

«Maintenant il faut quitter tous ces biens qui ne sont plus de ton âge» [Lucretius, *De la Nature*, traduction nouvelle-Introduction et notes de H. Clouard, Paris 1954].

«Mais maintenant quitte tous ces biens qui ne sont plus de ton âge» [Lucretius, *De la Nature*, Texte établi et traduit par A. Ernout, Paris 1968 (Les Belles Lettres)].

2. For this special use of *mitto* cf. Luer. VI. 1056: *Illud in his rebus mirari mitte*; Plaut. *Asin.* 330: *LI. tum igitur tu dives es factus? LE. mitte ridicularia*; Ter. *Heaut.* 319: *mitte, ad rem redi*; Cic. *De Or.* 3.226: «Mitte, obsecro», inquit «Crasse» Iulius «sermonem istum et te ad Gracchi fistulam refer».

behaviour and at his unjust complaints at the present. *Nunc*¹, at the beginning of 961, marks a new stage in the process of her thoughts and the imperatives *mitte* and *concede* show her looking ahead at the little space of time left to the mortal till his death-hour, as though she were saying: «You led an unprofitable life; you can't make up for it now. Nevertheless, what you can do is to stop doing things unbecoming your age; and if you didn't live with dignity, at least die with dignity, for die you must». The tone of Nature's speech then, without losing its predominant feature, that of austere vehemence, has nevertheless grown milder in 961-962, as though Nature had realised that she had overdone it with her previous strictures. On this interpretation the words *nunc* and *tamen* gain their full force as they are made now to mark this subtle change at 961.

I expounded above the reasons for which I am disinclined to accept emendations belonging to the first category; now, in the light of what has been claimed to be a change of tone at 961, I feel also unwilling to accept suggestions of the second category, which substitute a derogatory term for the *magnis* of the MS. tradition (e.g. *Maccus, segnis*); my own suggestion for the corrupt *magnis* is *dignus* which is, I think, in keeping with my previous observations on 955-962 and their thought-structure. Apart from this, there are a few more things to be said in support of *dignus*.

The feelings of man toward death are a recurrent theme of Book III. Lucretius speaks about them in three passages:

III. 884: *hinc indignatur se mortalem esse creatum*

III. 870-71: *Proinde ubi se videas hominem indignarier ipsum,
post mortem fore ut aut putescat corpore posto...*

and especially

III. 1045: *tu vero dubitabis et indignabere obire?*

It is to be noticed that in all three of them the same verb is used to describe these feelings, viz. *indignor*². Now, if the attitude of a mortal

1. *Nunc*, as so often, marks the transition introducing a new thought. See Lewis-Short s.v. II D and E.

2. This special use of *indignor* to convey the resentful attitude of man towards death is also found in Verg. *Aen.* 2.92 f.: *adflactus vitam in tenebris luctuque trahentem / et casum insontis mecum indignabar amici*; Ov. *Fast.* 4.895 f.: *cadit Mezentius*

rebellling against death is that of *indignatio*, is it not very likely that the adj. *dignus* will occur to characterize one who accepts death *aequo animo*¹?

Perhaps there is also another reason which makes us expect the occurrence of *dignus* at 962: *alienum dignitatis* (or *a dignitate*) is a very common expression²; wherever *alienus* in the sense «unbecoming» is found, the words *dignus*, *dignitas*, *indignus* have high contextual probabilities of occurrence³. Now, though *dignus* is used almost independently at 962 one feels that it should be connected, by way of contrast, with *aliena tua aetate*. Cicero's *navigationis labor alienus non ab aetate solum nostra, verum etiam a dignitate* (Cic. *Att.* 16.3) perfectly exemplifies the almost instinctive combination of these words in a formulaic phrase.

Some scholars (Heinze, Rose, Clarke) adduce Epict. *Diss.* IV. 1. 106⁴ as a corroboration of their view that a dative is needed with *concede*, which would somehow correspond in meaning to δὸς ἄλλοις τόπον or οὐ παραχωρήσεις τῷ κρείσσονι;⁵. If this passage was indeed in Lucretius' mind when composing this section of Book III, there are some striking correspondences to be noticed: ἐξέλθε, ἀπαλλάγῃθι ~ *concede*, ὡς εὐχάριστος ~ *aequo animo*. What about αἰδήμων? Is *dignus*, in the Lucretian context, not a most appropriate translation of it⁶?

ingens / atque indignanti pectore plangit humum. Note also that in the very last line of Vergil's *Aeneid* Turnus' soul flees *indignata* into the shades of Death.

1. A possible objection, at this point, might be that the exact opposite of *dignitas* is *indignitas* and not *indignatio*. This is right. But how does *indignatio* express itself in the case of the old man? Is it not by *querelae* and *lacrimae*? And, from the point of view of an Epicurian, can crying and complaining against death mean anything but *indignitas*? In short, *indignatio* and *indignitas* may be considered synonyms here.

2. Cf. Cic. *Fin.* 1.4: *quis alienum putet eius esse dignitatis*; id. *Fam.* 4.71: *non aliena esse ducere a dignitate*.

3. Cf. Lucr. VI. 69: *dis indigna putare alienaque pacis corum*.

4. ἐξέλθε, ἀπαλλάγῃθι ὡς εὐχάριστος, ὡς αἰδήμων· δὸς ἄλλοις τόπον. Δεῖ γενέσθαι καὶ ἄλλους, καθάπερ καὶ σὺ ἐγένου ... οὐκ ἐκστῆση τῶν ἄλλοτριῶν; οὐ παραχωρήσεις τῷ κρείττονι;

5. Δὸς ἄλλοις τόπον and οὐ παραχωρήσεις τῷ κρείσσονι; is not omitted by Lucretius. In fact, its general meaning is well represented in 964-965, but not before these lines. (See above p. 345 my observations about enim in 964).

6. For the combination of the adjective *dignus* (functioning here, as it does, as a predicative attribution) with an adverbial expression (here *aequo animo*) without the use of any connective cf. e.g. Ter. *Ad.* 887: *Lubens bene faxim*, Cic. *Leg.* 2.33: *Multa, incredibiliter vera cecidisse*. See also Kühner-Stegmann, *Ausführliche Gramma-*

Finally, *dignus* restores a neat symmetry between the opening and closing lines of 955-962: *aequo animo* balancing *lacrimas* and *querelas*, and *dignus* balancing *baratre*¹.

Büchner's dictum keeps turning in my mind; but in this particular case, I am convinced that no elaborate palaeographical mechanism is needed to explain the corruption of *dignus* into *magnis*.

Thessaloniki, The University

T. D. PAPANGHELIS

tik der Lateinischen Sprache, Vol. I., p. 234 ff.

1. All scholars, whether they accept the MSS. *baratre* or not, seem to agree that Lucretius wrote here something unflattering to the old man; whatever it is, it contrasts with *dignus* at 962, as *lacrimae* and *querelae* contrast with *aequo animo*.