Two of the three greatest epics extant in Latin literature were apparently not completed by their authors: Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* and Virgil’s *Aeneis*: although they fulfilled their intended six- and twelve-book scopes respectively, they evidently did not receive the *ultima lima* from their authors, owing to Virgil’s certainly and Lucretius’ probably premature death. By contrast, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the third great epic poem of Classical Rome, shows no sure sign in its fifteen-book form of authorial incompleteness, despite its author’s later complaint that this was indeed the case.\(^1\) In the textual and literary criticism of the *magna opera* of Lucretius and Virgil, the scholar is therefore required continually to take care, insofar as is possible, to distinguish between the text left by the author (the editor’s goal) and the text ultimately intended by the author (an unreachable but not uninteresting goal) when analysing the text inevitably corrupted in transmission (the paradosis). When faced, however, with apparent infelicities in phraseology, consistency, and the progression of narrative or argument, this task of distinction is often extremely difficult and ultimately uncertain.

The rich biographical tradition available for Virgil has allowed scholars for centuries to work confidently with the clear understanding that his *Aeneis* required further revision, perhaps over multiple years.\(^2\) In the case of Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* (henceforth *DRN*), the state of incompleteness, declared without qualification in the first sentence of this paper, has been occasionally disputed. Some scholars have claimed that the text of the poem as we have it, although undoubtedly lacerated and corrupted by almost one thousand years of transmission from its composition to the

\(^1\) In *Tristia* 1.7 Ovid claims that his exile prevented him from giving the work its final polish (28 *summam . . . manum, 30 ultima lima*) and that he wished to destroy the poem in the fire (15–20), therefore announcing *quicquid in his igitur utii rude carmen habebit, j emendaturus, si licuisset, eram* (39–40). This assertion could, however, be an attempt to align the fate of the *Metamorphoses* with the Augustan tradition of Virgil and his *Aeneis*.

\(^2\) Cf. the comment of Julius Hyginus on Virgil’s supposedly intended but unimplemented corrections (*apud* Gell. 10.16.11) *correcturum fuisse Vergilium putat, nisi mors occupasset.*
survival of our earliest manuscripts (of the ninth century), nevertheless stems from a once-complete work: any evidence apparently opposing that conclusion is the result of either chance misfortune in scribal transcription or the purposeful intervention of later readers. The case for the latter of these factors – active interpolation in Lucretius’ poem – will be the central subject of this survey: do such fake or forged verses lurk amidst the true?

The notion of spurious verses in Lucretius’ great Epicurean poem has been known to its critics since the Renaissance but did not merit anything approaching a systematic theory until the turn of the nineteenth century, when Heinrich Eichstädt suggested that the whole of Lucretius’ work had been improved and polished by a later author. Albert Forbiger subsequently took up this theory, although he claimed instead that this

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3 Lucretius’ text survives in two complete codices preserved at Leiden (O: Cod. Voss. Lat. F. 30, s. ix3/4; Q: Cod. Voss. Lat. Q 94, s. ix3/4); some 45% of the text exists in Copenhagen and Vienna (Copenhagen Gl. Kgl. S 211 2a, s. ix3/4 [= 1–2.456]; Vienna ÖNB Lat. 107 ff. 9–18, s. ix3/4 [= 2.642–3.661; 6.743–1286]), which schedae (s) show shared descent with Q. OQS allow the reconstruction of an archetype (Ω, c. s. viii), which is the farthest back that the stemmatic method can take the Lucretian scholar. Over fifty Italian manuscripts of the fifteenth (and sixteenth) centuries survive, but their ultimate source, the lost codex Poggianus (π, copied on the orders of Poggio Bracciolini in 1417), was transcribed from a lost apograph of O (which I term χ); they therefore bear no textual independence from O, which of course survives complete. (For summary of this once-contentious point, see my review of Enrico Flores’ third volume of *Lucretius* [Naples, 2009]: *Gnomon* 83 [2011] 597–608.) The new *Oxford Classical Text* of Lucretius that I am preparing will therefore draw upon the *Itali* solely as a source for conjectures.

4 The case that the work was complete was made most forcefully by J. van der Valk in his 1902 Kampen thesis *De Lucretiano carmine a poeta perfecto atque absoluto*, which maintained that nearly all apparent signs of imperfection were the result only of the poem’s manuscript transmission. A less extreme, and more subtle, thesis along similar lines was proposed by J. Mussehl, *De Lucretiani libri primi condicione ac retractatione* (Diss., Greifswald, 1912). The third Teubner editor, Josef Martin (Leipzig, 1934. 19695), argued in a lengthy article (“Lukrez und Cicero,” *WJA* 4 [1949–50] 1–52, 309–29) that the poem’s total completion is proved by the elaborate architectural structure evident in several books, often of supposed correspondences in the number of verses for large passages involved. However, these claims are illusory, being extremely difficult for a reader of the poem to detect and subjective in their posited division; Martin was even reduced to claiming that Book 3 has no such numerical balance because it was composed at an early stage when Lucretius had no interest in such correspondences! In reality, Martin’s entire numerical construct is too elaborate to be credible.

5 Cf. n. 43 below.