

REPETITION IN LUCRETIUS

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LUCRETIUS REPEATS HIMSELF more than do other Latin poets. The fact is well known and has been dealt with in a number of recent discussions. Rosamund Deutsch devotes much of her dissertation, *The Pattern of Sound in Lucretius*, to the various types of repetition the poet employs from simple alliteration to reiterated lines and half-lines.¹ First of all she points out (85) the interesting way in which phrases are repeated in close proximity, such as

at coria et carnem trahit et conducit in unum.
umor aquae porro ferrum condurat ab igni,
at coria et carnem mollit durata calore. [6.967-969]

She also observes that several verses may intervene, such as

et quibus ille modis congressus materiai [5.67]
et quibus ille modis divom metus insinuarit [5.73]

She further notes (89) that Lucretius often varies his repetitions to avoid monotony, as in

reddita corporibus primis per inane profundum [2.96]
paucula quae porro magnum per inane vagantur [2.105]
multaque praeterea magnum per inane vagantur [2.109]
multa minuta modis multis per inane videbis [2.116]

Finally Dr Deutsch shows (98-100) how the poet, when discussing a particular topic, frequently chooses a closely connected theme word which is repeated several times in the course of the discussion. In passing we might add to her observation that these theme words are often the components of what might be termed "theme phrases," as the poet's treatment of colour in Book 2 will illustrate. Of the one hundred and twelve verses devoted to the topic, twenty-two end with the word *color* in the plural or in one of its oblique cases, that is, filling the final three syllables of the line. Two reiterated phrases account for six of the twenty-two verse-endings. They are *tincta colore* (736, 747, 776) and *variantque colores* (759)/*variosque colores* (783)/*variove colore* (825).

Another discussion of repetition in Lucretius is found in Cyril Bailey's Prolegomena to his edition of the *De Rerum Natura*.² He largely follows Deutsch but adds a few more types of repetition. He observes (163) that Lucretius often repeats lines which are in effect the axioms of his theory

¹Rosamund E. Deutsch, *The Pattern of Sound in Lucretius* (Bryn Mawr 1939).

²*Titi Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura* ed. Cyril Bailey (Oxford 1947).

when he wishes to refer to them. Of this practice numerous examples may be found, such as

*nam quodcumque suis mutatum finibus exit,
continuo hoc mors est illius quod fuit ante.*

[1.670-671 = 1.792-793 = 2.753-754 = 3.519-520]

and

*hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necessest
non radii solis neque lucida tela diei
discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque.*

[1.146-148 = 2.59-61 = 3.91-93 = 6.39-41]

He further points out (145) that, like the regular succession of particles in the sections of argumentation, repeated phrases frequently introduce a new topic. For example, the words

*Quod quoniam docui, pergam conectere rem quae
ex hoc apta fidem ducat*

[2.478-479]

introduce the proof that the number of atomic shapes is finite. Further on the poet uses the same words when he begins the argument proving that the number of atoms of each shape is infinite (2.522-523). He also suggests (162) that Lucretius sometimes repeated abnormal idiomatic expressions to establish their usage. He adduces the example of *tanto quique magis* (meaning "by so much the more") which is first found at 3.700 and is repeated at 5.343. It is difficult, however, to see how the single repetition of this idiom approximately two thousand lines later serves to establish its usage. Nor can I envisage the poet taking pains to establish the usage of idioms which might trouble his future editors.

W. S. Maguinness has also touched upon Lucretius' repetition, though he, like Dr Deutsch, deals primarily with the repetition of single words.³ He thinks that the poet's quest for clarity led him to repeat words and phrases in a manner avoided by other Latin writers.

Although each of these scholars takes a slightly different view of repetition in Lucretius, their conclusions are fundamentally the same. The following quotation from Dr Deutsch (46-47) seems a fair expression of the view current today:

The same poetic device [repetition] is to be found also in other authors, both Latin and English, but the reiterations of Lucretius serve a special function. The repetition of sounds which are unrelated in meaning shows that the recurrence of pure phonetic tones appealed to the poet's ear for their own sake. But the recurrence of words, which is naturally made possible by the sense of the passage in which they recur, is clearly a

³W. S. Maguinness, "The Language of Lucretius," in *Lucretius* ed. D. R. Dudley (London 1965) 73-75.

didactic device used by Lucretius to emphasize the principles which he is attempting to enforce upon a skeptical reader.

In short, prevailing opinion holds that the poet employed repetition primarily for didactic reasons.

F. M. Smith,⁴ the most recent writer to consider Lucretius' use of repetition, likewise draws attention to its practical and propagandistic value in scientific and philosophical exposition. He further suggests that verbal echoes and repetitions, though not always necessarily conscious, often reveal important themes and concepts which were identified in the poet's mind. For example, the verses

*cum tamen inter se prostrati in gramine molli
propter aquae rivum sub ramis arboris altae
non magnis opibus iucunde corpora curant,
praesertim cum tempestas arridet et anni
tempora conspergunt viridantis floribus herbas.*

are employed in the proem of the second book (29-33), where the poet suggests that simple pleasures ought to satisfy modern man, and are repeated in Book 5 (1392-1396) in the description of the amusements of primitive man. The poet's feeling that the ordinary diversions which satisfied primitive man ought to be adequate for his modern counterpart is reflected in the verbal repetition.

But Smith's discussion, like those of Deutsch, Bailey, and Maguinness, although it sheds light on a new facet of the question, nevertheless treats repetition only as part of a larger topic, Lucretian thought processes. Nor does it significantly alter the fact that repetition, especially of phrases, has been treated only in a most perfunctory and casual manner. Yet Lucretius repeats himself much more frequently than most commentators seem to realize, or at any rate to document. This assertion may be proven by analysing a passage of the *De Rerum Natura* in a manner similar to that employed by Milman Parry in his endeavours to demonstrate that the Homeric epics were oral verse compositions.⁵ I have chosen as a typical random sample twenty-five verses beginning at the first paragraph after the middle of the poem (4.322-323). The variety of passages in which the phrases are repeated has left me satisfied that these twenty-five lines are fairly typical. In the analysis, phrases with continuous underlining recur either verbatim or with some negligible change, and words with broken underlining have analogues in the same metrical position.

⁴F. M. Smith, "Some Lucretian thought processes," *Hermathena* 102 (1966) 77-82.

⁵Milman Parry, "Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-making," *HSCP* 41 (1930) 73-147. See especially 118-120.

Splendida porro oculi⁶ fugitant vitantque tueri.⁷
sol etiam caecat⁸, contra si⁹ tendere pergas¹⁰, 325
propterea quia¹¹ vis magnast¹² ipsius et alte
aera per purum¹³ graviter simulacra feruntur¹⁴
et feriunt oculos¹⁵ turbantia composituras.
praeterea splendor quicumque est¹⁶ acer adurit¹⁷
saepe oculos ideo quod semina possidet ignis 330
multa, dolorem oculis quae gignunt¹⁸ insinuando.¹⁹
lurida praeterea fiunt quaecumque tuentur²⁰
arquati, quia luroris de corpore eorum²¹
semina multa²² fluunt simulacris obvia rerum
multaque sunt oculis²³ in eorum denique mixta, 335
quae contage sua palloribus omnia pingunt.²⁴

⁶*porro oculos*—3.359.

⁷*vitamque tueri*—1.195, *caeloque tuentur*—1.152, 4.434, 5.92, 6.50.

⁸*sol etiam caeli*—2.210.

⁹*contra si*—1.570.

¹⁰*dicere pergam*—3.422.

sumere perge —2.347.

exsolvere pergo —1.932, 4.7.

inducere pergis —1.16.

concedere pergat —1.1080, 2.237.

¹¹*propterea quia*—1.631; 2.72, 232; 3.572; 4.186, 320, 338, 349, 1220; 5.558, 920, 1446; 6.97, 462, 1049.

¹²*vis magna*—6.530, 815.

¹³*aera per*—2.146, *aera per multum quia dum simulacra feruntur*—4.358, *aera per multum*—4.558, 5.580.

¹⁴*simulacra feruntur*—4.164, 176, 210, 239, 358, 735; 6.76.

¹⁵*feriant oculos*—4.217, 257; 6.923, *feriunt oculorum*—4.691.

¹⁶*quicumque est*—5.177; 6.502.

¹⁷*acer obhaesit*—4.420.

¹⁸*quae gignatur*—2.1078.

¹⁹*gignere conveniundo*—2.923.

²⁰*fient quaecumque creantur*—1.169, *fieri caeloque tuentur*—1.152, and cf. *fieri in terris caeloque tuentur*—6.50.

²¹*de corpore eorum*—4.43, 5.154.

²²*semina multa*—5.658, 6.160.

²³*multaque sunt* { *nobis*—5.860 *sunt* } *oculis* —4.715
 { *ignis*—6.863 *sis* } —3.1025

²⁴ { *constant*—1.588, 2.337, 694, 724
 debent —1.1039
 fiant —2.288
 possent —1.166
 tollat —1.701
omnia { *versat* —2.882
 reddat —1.1011
 praestat—3.214
 libant —3.11
 restant —3.947

E tenebris²⁵ autem quae sunt in luce²⁶ tuemur
 propterea quia, cum propior caliginis aer²⁷
 ater init oculos prior et possedit apertos,²⁸
 insequitur candens confestim lucidus aer²⁹ 340
 qui quasi purgat eos ac nigras discutit umbras³⁰
 aeris illius, nam multis³¹ partibus hic est³²
 mobilior multisque minutor et mage pollens.
 qui simul atque³³ vias oculorum³⁴ luce replevit³⁵
 atque patefecit quas ante obsederat aer 345
 (ater), continuo rerum simulacra sequuntur³⁶
 quae sita³⁷ sunt in luce³⁸, lacessuntque ut videamus.³⁹
 quod contra⁴⁰ facere in tenebris e luce nequimus⁴¹
 propterea quia posterior caliginis aer⁴²

Two facts emerge at once from this analysis. First, there are no fewer than thirty verbatim repetitions in the twenty-five lines, which is more than I expected to find, and more, I think, than is generally realized.⁴³ Secondly, most of the repetitions serve no apparent didactic function. C. Bailey too seemed aware of Lucretius' non-didactic repetition when

²⁵e tenebris—3.1, in tenebris—2.15, 54, 56, 58; 3.77, 88, 90; 4.231, 235, 348; 5.170; 6.38.

²⁶sunt in luce—4.347.

²⁷cf. 4.349; propterea quia cum—6.462.

²⁸possedit apertos—6.1050.

²⁹editus } —3.122
 percitus } aer —6.685
 abditus } —6.1037
 morbidus } —6.1097.

³⁰abluit umbras—4.378.

³¹nam multis—2.592.

³²hic/haec est—2.1066, 3.992, 4.1089, 6.238.

³³quod simul atque—3.211, 4.1041; simul atque—1.777, 4.40.

³⁴vias oculorum—4.351.

³⁵luce repleta est—2.806.

³⁶
 rerum simulacra { vocamus—4.30
 videmus—1.1060
 vagari —4.127
 recedent—4.130
 feruntur—4.164, 210, 239
 vagari —4.724.

³⁷quae sita—2.802.

³⁸sunt in luce—4.337.

³⁹ut videamus—4.245, 255, 633.

⁴⁰quod contra—1.82, 780; 2.280.

⁴¹in tenebris—see note 25; cf. in tenebris, in luci—4.235, and in luce timemus—2.56, 3.88, 6.36.

⁴²cf. line 338 above.

⁴³Bailey, for example, *ad loc.* notes but one.

he wrote: "Sometimes words which he had already written seem to stay in his mind and come out in the same collocation in quite a different context . . ." (145). Further on, Bailey calls this phenomenon the "semi-conscious running of phrases in the poet's mind," but he never offers an explanation for it. I think an explanation can be given if we turn to the first poet who employed repetition extensively and consider why he did so.

Homer's reasons for employing repetition were expounded by Milman Parry.⁴⁴ According to him, the repetitions were the formulae of an oral tradition which Homer, an oral poet, inherited from his predecessors and which provided him with a ready-made store of diction which would express much of what he wanted to say as he improvised his heroic song. The formulae, in short, assisted Homer to compose. But formulae also made listening easier for the audience, since many of the repetitions, used time and again, would be almost as familiar to the audience as they were to the poet himself.

To return to Lucretius, we can see at once an interesting parallel in his didactic use of repetition, especially if we realize that Lucretius' audience was not so very different from Homer's. As silent reading was virtually unknown in antiquity, Lucretius' audience, like Homer's, would have heard the poem recited or read aloud.⁴⁵ Thus, for his audience, Lucretius' repeated lines and phrases would have served a purpose somewhat similar to that served by Homer's formulae.

But what is more important is that the primary function of Homer's formulae also served Lucretius. They helped him to compose. It cannot be denied that Lucretius had difficulty writing his poem. He twice mentions the *patrii sermonis egestas* (1.832; 3.260), and reveals his constant preoccupation with his efforts to set forth "the nature of things" in the "writings of our country's tongue" (*naturam . . . rerum . . . patriis exponere chartis* [4.969-970]). Indeed, before beginning the first argument of the poem, he remarks upon the difficulty of the task in the famous words

*Nec me animi fallit Graiorum obscura reperta
difficile inlustrare Latinis versibus esse,
multa novis verbis praesertim cum sit agendum
propter egestatem linguae et rerum novitatem;
sed tua me virtus tamen et sperata voluptas
suavis amicitiae quemvis efferre laborem
suadet et inducit noctes vigilare serenas
quaerentem dictis quibus et quo carmine demum
clara tuae possim praepandere lumina menti,
res quibus occultas penitus convisere possis.*

[1.136-145]

⁴⁴See the article cited above in note 5.

⁴⁵Deutsch 1-3; G. L. Hendrickson, "Ancient Reading," *CJ* 25 (1929) 182-196, answered by W. P. Clark in *CJ* 26 (1931) 698-700. I would agree with Dr Deutsch's view that Clark fails to refute Hendrickson's arguments.

There are also expressions such as

nunc age dicta meo dulci quaesita labore
percipe . . . [3.730-731]

and

conquisita diu dulcique reperta labore
digna tua pergam disponere carmina vita. [3.419-420]

which indicate the effort that went into his exposition of Greek Epicureanism in Latin verse. These verses also suggest that his effort was necessary to surmount two major difficulties. As the total vocabulary of Latin is smaller than that of Greek, there was the considerable problem of finding equivalents for Greek terms where none existed in Latin. But, once the equivalents were found, there remained the problem of fitting them into Latin hexameters. It was here that the repetitions assisted the poet to compose. This can be easily demonstrated in his treatment of one of the most important concepts of all the *Graiorum obscura reperta*, that of the atom. The Greek philosophers had used the word *ἄτομος*, for which Lucretius had several equivalents, such as *primordia rerum* and *semina rerum*. Taking the last words as an example, we find this collocation recurring in the overwhelming majority of cases in one metrical position, namely occupying the final two feet after the bucolic diaeresis.⁴⁶ Therefore when his Epicurean source used the word *ἄτομος*, Lucretius had a ready equivalent around which he could build the rest of his verse or which he could use to complete the line after the bucolic diaeresis. Similarly the Greek word *φύσις*, which Lucretius translated as *rerum natura*, occurs in two or three fixed positions governed by the metrical shape that the words take as *natura* changes its case. Again, once a metrical position is established for a given shape, the poet will repeat the collocation in that position most of the time. For example, of the six occurrences of the two words *rerum natura* with *natura* in the nominative singular, four occupy the same position in the line, one is a slight variant, and the other is quite different. Occupying the line end, they are:

<i>. . . . naturaque rerum</i>	[1.498]
<i>rerum natura creatrix</i>	[1.629]
<i>rerum natura creatrix</i>	[2.1117]
<i>rerum natura repente</i>	[3.931]
<i>rerum natura novarum</i>	[6.646]

and finally the variant:

rerum primum natura creatrix [5.1362]

Thus we can see how the poet employed formulae to assist him to overcome the difficulty he found in expressing in Latin verse the subtle concepts of Greek philosophy.

⁴⁶*Semina rerum* occurs finally in the following lines: 1.59, 176; 2.755, 678, 833, 1059, 1072; 5.916; 6.789, 1093.

It is also possible to demonstrate how a formula takes shape in the poet's mind and is subsequently employed to assist his composition. Let us take for example the whole line

quae variae retinent gentes et saecula ferarum [4.413]

Near the end of Book 2, in Lucretius' description of the products of our *alma mater* earth, we first find the antithesis between the *genus humanum* and the *saecla ferarum* in the line

et genus humanum, parit omnia saecula ferarum [2.995]

The almost identical words *gens* and *hominum* had occurred earlier when the poet praised Ennius, who won fame for his poetry *per gentes Italas hominum* (1.119), but this is the first occurrence of the much used and fine formula *saecla ferarum*. Further on, the poet repeats the antithesis in the verse

et varias hominum gentis et saecula ferarum [2.1076]

and here he introduces into the formula the concept of the diversity of the nations of man, which he first expressed in the famous *magna mater* passage in Book 2 with the words *hanc variae gentes* (610). Coming back to the original verse in question, we can now see how the formula facilitated Lucretius' task. In the context he is discussing the many apparent optical illusions. He observes that the rising sun often seems to touch the mountains from behind which it rises, though in fact a vast distance separates them. To this distance, which is poetically described as the "vast levels of ocean" (*immania ponti / aequora*), and to the "many thousands of lands" (*terrarum milia multa*) he adds the formulaic antithesis between men and beasts. The line is not absolutely necessary here, but it subtly and almost subconsciously augments the vastness, and was easily adaptable to the context by the change of *quae* for *et* and *retinent* for *hominum*. Such examples could be multiplied to illustrate how the poet employed formulae to assist his composition.

To say that Lucretius employed formulae to assist his composition in no way depreciates his genius or implies that he was forced to use formulae, for it is possible to show with the formula *genus humanum* what an effect the poet could achieve when he broke with his normal formular usage. Several times in the description of the rise of human civilization in Book 5 the poet employs the formula *genus humanum* after a long initial syllable (e.g., at lines 925, 1014, 1026, 1057, and 1145). Then suddenly in the midst of the section dealing with religion he bursts out with the words

O genus infelix humanum [1194]

By thrusting the word *infelix* between the two members of the frequently

repeated formula Lucretius effectively underlines the wretched state in which he finds the *genus humanum* as a result of religion. So far was the poet from being constrained to use formulae.

Nevertheless he found his task difficult for the reasons he states. Formulae helped him to overcome part of this difficulty. But this emphatically was not the only reason why he chose to employ them. There were two other factors which must have influenced his decision. First there was the didactic value of the formulae, which we have already discussed. The other consideration was the fact that formulae were an integral part of the epic style in which he chose to write the *De Rerum Natura*.

Lucretius followed the example of Empedocles in setting forth a philosophical system (or at least the physical theories of a philosophical system) in epic verse. The poet's high regard for his Greek predecessor is apparent in the lines which precede his criticism of Empedocles' philosophy:

*carmina quin etiam divini pectoris eius
vociferantur et exponunt praeclara reperta,
ut vix humana videatur stirpe creatus.*

Such praise Lucretius otherwise reserved for Epicurus.

However, our poet did not follow Empedocles too closely, for his language was different, and so was his philosophy. For the epic qualities of his work he rather imitated the greatest epic poet that Rome had known to that date, and the style which resulted has been well described as "redolent of Ennius."⁴⁷ Others have dealt with Ennius' influence on Lucretius' language and metre, and there is no need to repeat their observations here.⁴⁸ Our focus of attention is upon the repetitions, and I think that the most important consideration which led Lucretius to employ formulae was the fact that Ennius had done so before him. In the remains of Ennius I was able to find the following repeated phrases: *lupus femina* (Ann. 68, 70), *divumque hominumque* (Ann. 249, 580, 581), *et simul* (Ann. 91, 128, 352), *stellis fulgentibus aptum* (Ann. 29, 159, and cf. *stellis ardentibus apta* [Ann. 339]), *in alto* (Ann. 378, 380), *summa nituntur opum vi* (Ann. 161, 412), *corde suo* (Ann. 175, 548), *haec effatus* (Ann. 47, 59), *nox intempesta* (Ann. 102, 167), *in bello* (Ann. 287, 327), *Romana iuventus* (Ann. 469, 537, 550), *ad caelum* (Ann. 282, 531), *labitur uncta carina* (Ann. 386, 478), *olli respondit* (Ann. 33, 119), *iamque ferre* (Ann. 282, 593), *o genitor* (Ann. 113, 456), *quatit ungula terram* (Ann. 224, 277, and cf. *concutit ungula terram* [Ann. 439]), *est*

⁴⁷Maguinness *op. cit.* (above, n. 3) 84.

⁴⁸See in particular W. A. Merrill, "Parallelisms and Coincidences in Lucretius and Ennius," *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 3 (1919) 249-254, and Maguinness *op. cit.* (above, n. 3) 84 ff.

operae (*Ann.* 16, 465), *permensa perumper* (*Ann.* 71, 455), *Poenos . . . oriundos* (*Ann.* 220, 229), and finally the most interesting phrase *in luminis oras* (*Ann.* 114, 131).⁴⁹ The final expression is, of course, one of Lucretius' best known formulae,⁵⁰ and shows that Lucretius adopted at least one of his predecessor's formulae as his own. That this was the only formula which Lucretius borrowed from Ennius is unlikely, since our poet repeats an astonishing number of phrases from the earlier writer.⁵¹ Indeed no fewer than thirteen Ennian phrases are repeated in the *De Rerum Natura*, and among them are found some of Lucretius' most memorable formulae, such as *lumina solis*, *Acherusia templa*, and *somnoque sepultis*.⁵² Thus, if Lucretius employed his predecessor's formulae, I think his decision to employ formulae was primarily stylistic, and followed necessarily from his decision to adopt a style "redolent of Ennius."

To sum up. We have seen that formulae constitute an important part of Lucretius' style. In deciding to use formulae the poet was no doubt influenced by two entirely practical considerations, the didactic value of repetition and the assistance it would afford him in composing. These were not, however, the main reason why the poet employed repetition, for formular composition was an aspect of the epic style which Lucretius adopted from Ennius to write the greatest monument to Epicurus that survives, the *De Rerum Natura*.

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⁴⁹This list was compiled from the *Index sermonis* of *Ennianae Poesis Reliquiae* ed. J. Vahlen (reprinted Amsterdam 1963) and is restricted to repetitions in the *Annales*. The following are repeated in other works: *arbores vento vacant*—*Varia* 12, *Sc.* 185; *ex ore*—*Ann.* 578, *Sc.* 306; *monstrant viam*—*Sc.* 321, 398 (*monstrat*); *in somnis*—*Ann.* 219, *Sc.* 36; *horrescunt tela*—*Sc.* 140, *Ann.* 393 (*-cit telis*); *mari magno*—*Ann.* 445, *Sc.* 65, which is employed by Lucretius in 2.1.

⁵⁰Used four times; 1.22, 179; 5.224, 781.

⁵¹Merrill *op. cit.* (above, n. 48).

⁵²They are: *lumina solis* (*Ann.* 283; *Lucr.* 1.5, 989; 2.108, 162, 654; 5.462); *Acherusia templa* (*Sc.* 107; *Lucr.* 1.120, 3.25, 86); *somnoque sepulti(s)* (*Ann.* 292; *Lucr.* 1.133, 5.975); *sufferre laborem* (*Ann.* 425; *Lucr.* 3.999, 5.1272, 1359); *virum vi(s)* (*Ann.* 276; *Lucr.* 1.728, 2.326); *caeli templa* (*Ann.* 65, *Lucr.* 1.1064, 6.1228); *aetheris oris* (*Sat.* 4; *Lucr.* 2.1000, 3.835, 5.143, 683); *fortis equi vis* (*Ann.* 374—*fortis equus*, *Ann.* 486—*equos vi*; *Lucr.* 3.8, 764); *media regione* (*Ann.* 505, 481—*mediis regionibus*; *Lucr.* 3.140, 6.732); *duri . . . laboris* (*Ann.* 345; *Lucr.* 3.999, 5.1272, 1359); *in somnis* (*Ann.* 219; *Lucr.* 3.431, 4.34, 770, 789, 965, 972, 988, 1006, 1012, 1097; 5.62, 885, 1171, 1181); *tollitur in* (*Ann.* 442; *Lucr.* 5.265, 6.507); *fit copia* (*Ann.* 407; *Lucr.* 5.359 [Lachmann, mss. *sit*], 6.829).