

LUCRETIUS 3.1–3

O tenebris tantis tam clarum extollere lumen
qui primus potuisti inlustrans commoda uitae,
te sequor, o Graiae gentis decus . . .

'The reading of the MSS, and not the Renaissance correction *e*, is certainly what L. wrote.' So Kenney in his edition of Lucretius 3.¹ I believe that he is right, but that the case for *o* (apart from manuscript authority) rests on different grounds from those which he adduces.

Kenney quotes D.A. West's statement that *e* is 'not worthy of the precise and vivid imagination of this poet', and himself finds it anaemic by contrast with the sonorous *o*.² These are subjective judgements. One can only reply by expressing disagreement and pointing out that *e* has seemed unexceptionable to the numerous editors who have printed it and have preferred it to *o* (which Lachmann thought *valde ineptum*).

Wakefield, almost the only editor before Kenney who has printed *o*,³ commented 'Ad propensissimos poetae in praeceptorem suum affectus convenientissime', and Timpanaro wrote 'Niente di più adatto a questa solenne e appassionata invocazione che l'O iniziale.' I do not think this argument can carry much weight. I would question the view that *o* with the vocative suggests emotion, or even solemnity. Generally there seems no significant difference of tone between the simple vocative and the vocative with *o*. According to Fordyce on Catullus 46.9 *o* with the vocative 'has an emotional content, and marks sentimental . . . pathetic, or impassioned address.' To confine oneself to Catullus, is there any real difference between *o colonia* in 17.1 and *colonia* in 17.7? And is not the opening of 30 ('Alfene immemor atque unanimis false sodalibus') much more impassioned than that of 30 ('o furum optime balneariorum') or of 44 ('o funde noster seu Sabine seu Tiburs')?

'Lucretius uses *o* very sparingly, for emotional effect' (Kenney on 3.1). Apart from *o bone* in 3.206, 'clearly felt as colloquial' (Kenney), the only examples other than the first sentence of 3 are of *o* with an exclamatory accusative, which certainly expresses emotion, but should be distinguished from *o* with a vocative. The fact that Lucretius uses *o* with the vocative so seldom suggests if anything that he would not have used it twice in the same sentence. But if his practice provides no support for *o*, it is otherwise with that of other Latin poets. This deserves a fuller and more precise consideration than that given by Timpanaro.

When a Latin poet begins an address with a relative clause or participial phrase the normal practice is to put an *o* before the relative or participial phrase. Presumably the feeling was that when the vocative was postponed or, as it occasionally is, omitted, *o* was required to make it clear that the writer was addressing someone. I quote one example each from five different authors of *o qui* etc. 'o

¹ Cf. Kenney, *The Classical Text*, p. 150, 'It was not until 1960 that Timpanaro showed that the transmitted reading at Lucretius 3.1 was in fact what the poet wrote.' The reference is to Timpanaro's

article in *Philologus* 104 (1960), 147–9.

² Note on Lucretius 3.1 and Preface, p. 35.

³ His text however has *O! Tenebris* . . . , not *O tenebris* . . .

qui flosculus es Iuuentiorum' (no vocative) Catullus 24.1; 'o qui res hominumque deumque/aeternis regis imperiis' (no vocative), Virgil, *Aen.* 1.229-30; 'o quae fontibus integris/gaudes, apricos nocte flores/ . . . Pimplea dulcis' Horace, *Odes* 1.26.6-9; 'o qui pendentia paruo/aera cibo celas, moderator arundinis' Ovid, *Met.* 8.855-6; 'o magnae qui moenia prospicis urbis/Tarpeia de rupe tonans' Lucan 1.195-6.⁴ It will suffice to quote two examples of the analogous *o* followed by a participle. 'o nimium caelo et pelago confise sereno/ nudus in ignota, Palinure, iacebis harena' Virgil, *Aen.* 5.870-1; 'o saepe mecum tempus in ultimum/deducte . . ./Pompei' Horace, *Odes* 2.7.1-4.⁵ I have noticed two passages where a relative clause followed by a vocative is not preceded by *o* (Virgil, *Aen.* 8.511-13; *Culex* 24-5), but in both *tu* precedes the relative and there is therefore no need for *o*.⁶

It should be said that in two respects Lucretius' sentence does not conform to type. Firstly in none of the other sentences of the *o qui* type is the *o* so far separated from the relative. Secondly I have found no other example where there is a second *o*, before the vocative later in the sentence. With regard to the latter point Timpanaro quotes Horace, *Odes* 1.32.13-15 ('o decus Phoebi et dapibus supremi/grata testudo Iouis, o laborum/dulce lenimen'), but this and other similar cases of the repetition of *o*⁷ are not exact parallels. Perhaps however the fact that Lucretius does not address Epicurus by name but uses a complimentary descriptive phrase makes the repetition of *o* acceptable.⁸ But if with an initial *o* his sentence is not exactly paralleled, it is even more abnormal without one. The practice of Latin poets shows that the relative requires an antecedent *o*, and it is on these grounds (in addition to manuscript authority) that this reading should be accepted.

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⁴ Other examples: Virg. *Aen.* 1.597-601 Ovid, *Met.* 7.164-5, 15.39, *Rem.* 557-8; Lucan 9.379-80. I owe the Ovidian references to Professor Kenney. Catullus 24.1, *Aen.* 1.229-30, and Lucan 1.195-6 are referred to by Timpanaro.

⁵ Other examples, Catullus 36.11, 64.22-3, 323-4; Virg., *Geo.* 4.353-4, *Aen.* 1.597-601, 4.31, 6.83, 12.95; Hor., *Odes* 3.21.1-4, *Aen.* 5.870-1 and 6.83 are referred to by Timpanaro.

⁶ In Virgil, *Geo.* 1.12.14, however, we have 'tuque o cui . . .'

⁷ e.g. Virg., *Geo.* 2.40, *Aen.* 1.198-9, 2.281, 10.18; Ovid, *Her.* 16.171-2, *Am.* 2.9.1-2; Lucan 2.531-2; 7.588, 8.94-5.

⁸ In the same way Maecenas is addressed by Virgil as 'o decus, o famae merito pars maxima nostrae' (*Geo.* 2.40) and by Horace as 'o et praesidium et dulce decus meum' (*Odes* 1.1.2).