

# The Light Side of the Moon: A Lucretian Acrostic by Leah Kronenberg

**Post by “Godfrey” of March 15, 2022 at 6:42 PM**

*De Rerum Natura* is the gift that keeps on giving.... The attached paper discusses references in the poem to Aratus, Homer and others as well as some of the related cross-fertilization between ancient poets. It also discusses Lucretius' use of the theme of light and his references to Epicurus as the sun and himself as the moon, among other things.

I just started reading it to find out what an acrostic is, but it sucked me right in and totally exposed my ignorance of the classics.

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**Post by “Joshua” of March 15, 2022 at 10:07 PM**

Very interesting! I'll need to read that again more attentively, thank you for sharing that!

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**Post by “Cassius” of March 15, 2022 at 11:19 PM**

Wait a minute!

I just read an entire article based on going through thousands of lines of poem and finding four lines of which the first letters seem to spell out a synonym for "light"??????

[Don](#) are you impressed by this? Or is it much ado about nothing?



**Post by “Joshua” of March 16, 2022 at 2:38 AM**

It's not likely to be a coincidence, if that's the implication of your question! Virgil has a well-known acrostic in his *Georgics* in the terminal characters of four lines, spelling out *O-T-I-A*. He was followed by Horace in his *Satires*, who employed the same acrostic in the first characters of four lines.

Otium was an important word for upper-class Romans with good educations: it signified for them the kind of dignified leisure that they praised most highly; managing (perhaps *directing* is a better word for it) the cultivation of their country estates, maintaining personal libraries, collecting statuary, frescoes and fine furniture, playing host to the *convivium*, and, of course; reading and writing Greek and Latin literature.

Ask someone on the street to describe poetry, and the first thing they're likely to say is that 'it rhymes'. But poetry in the ancient world did *not* rhyme; like Milton and Shakespeare, they wrote in strictly metered blank verse. Also like Shakespeare, they continued to avail themselves of many other literary devices to ornament their work: Alliteration, assonance, dissonance, cacophony, chiasmus, asyndeton, onomatopoeia, metonymy, synecdoche--and probably a hundred others that I never even learned the names of!

There is a bawdy epigram in the *Greek Anthology* whereby the epigrammatist, a noted παίδεραστής, observes that: (spoiler...)

Quote

Display Spoiler

The numerical value of the letters in πρωκτὸς (anus) and χρυσὸς (gold) is the same. I once found this out reckoning up casually.

Perhaps not the most helpful example of wordplay I could furnish, but certainly one I won't soon forget...

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## Post by “Don” of March 16, 2022 at 4:16 AM

I fully agree with [Joshua](#) (to whom, I might add, I defer to in all matters poetical). The probability that those letters would arrange themselves in that order "by accident" in a work as finely-tuned as Lucretius's is extremely low. I think the paper's author lays out a strong case. Just another example of how far removed we are from the social and cultural context the ancients took for granted. I could easily imagine an ancient, well-read reader of Lucretius getting to that point and saying, "Oh, clever! I see what you did there, Lucretius. Well played!"

## Post by “Cassius” of March 16, 2022 at 6:13 AM

Joshua (or anyone) do we have record from the ancient world of an ancient writer discussing this as an intentional technique, or is it all surmise by the modern world?

In other words we are sure we are not talking some "Bible Code" nonsense?

I am fully prepared to accept this if there is enough evidence of intent.

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## Post by “Don” of March 16, 2022 at 7:55 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

In other words we are sure we are not talking some "Bible Code" nonsense?

Oh, I don't think this is anywhere near something like the Bible Codes (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible\\_code?wprov=sfla1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_code?wprov=sfla1) )

However, I doubt you're going to find an in-depth explication of this in Lucretius in an ancient extant source (other than those mentioned in the paper). We are lucky to have any ancient texts at all.

Your Bible code analogy falls down when one considers we don't know who wrote the Bible and then people pick and choose across books and wide time periods to "discover" their prophetic bs. With Lucretius, we know one person who we know wrote one work (we know of) and we know he was a master wordsmith. I have no problem thinking he would use every trick in his literary quiver to convey his message.

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## Post by “Joshua” of March 16, 2022 at 11:33 AM

I'll look into Horace's *Ars Poetica* this evening, and see what I find. He has quite a lot to say about meter and style. There are many other grammatists from the ancient world to look into, but for me the Virgil/Horace connection clinches it. The allusion seems very clear.

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## Post by “Godfrey” of March 16, 2022 at 1:06 PM

This strikes me as an unintended instance in which to examine epistemological methods of inference 😊

For starters, I would posit that there are two different prolepseis on display here as to what constitutes a poem. From there, we have evidence of an unlikely situation: an acrostic. There seem to be two opposing views on acrostics: 1) they are a relatively common and recognized technique in ancient poetry, and 2) they are purely random occurrences.

One approach to the current evidence is to blindly accept the statements of classical scholars, one of which we have among us in the person of Joshua. Personally, in this instance, this is my approach and I base it on my interactions with Joshua and the fact that he supports the assertions in the paper which are purportedly made by experts in the field.

Another, equally valid, is to look for more evidence of the use and acceptance of acrostics, and perhaps more evidence of the variety of structures in ancient poetry.

Yet another approach is to examine the odds of a given acrostic occurring and to make inferences from that.

Or one could say that we just can't know the answer to this thorny problem.

One could also say that we need to understand the motivations of each person making assertions. And to go a step further, one could try to determine if these people really exist or are programs on a supercomputer in a remote location in Utah.

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## Post by “Cassius” of March 16, 2022 at 1:22 PM

I think you're right Godfrey and that even in fun this is a good example of the issue.

My first inclination is to say that we consider the evidence from "all of the above" sources that you suggest be possibilities.

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

posit that there are two different prolepseis on display here as to what constitutes a poem

I am not sure what you mean there, however (?) I have a feeling that you are using the word "prolepsis" in that sentence as if it is interchangeable with "concept." I am still not ready to embrace that "anticipations" = "concepts." Are you?

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

One approach to the current evidence is to blindly accept the statements of classical scholars, one of which we have among us in the person of Joshua.

This would be an example of the "rely on the experts" method. No doubt we do in many situations rely on experts. That's an issue in itself as to how we do that, because sometimes experts do make mistakes, and there are differences of opinion as to who constitutes an expert. Someone wanting to write up a paper on that would find some good material in US Federal litigation case law, as there is an extensive line of cases that discusses issues revolving around the admissibility of expert testimony in court. No doubt there are significant differences in context but there is this important analogy: In court issues for fact determination, we think generally that the most fair result comes from a panel of impartial jurors; we want the jurors to make the decision in disputed issues to get the most "fair" result. What happens when jurors don't have the experience or training to be able to judge the issue? We let "experts" testify, and the task of the jurors switches to judging the credibility and persuasiveness of the experts, not of the ultimate facts directly. There is lots of interesting discussion about these issues in the legal system.

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

Yet another approach is to examine the odds of a given acrostic occurring and to make inferences from that.

This would be a statistics-based approach. That too can be helpful, but there too we have some helpful rules of thumb about how to separate statistics from "damned lies."

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

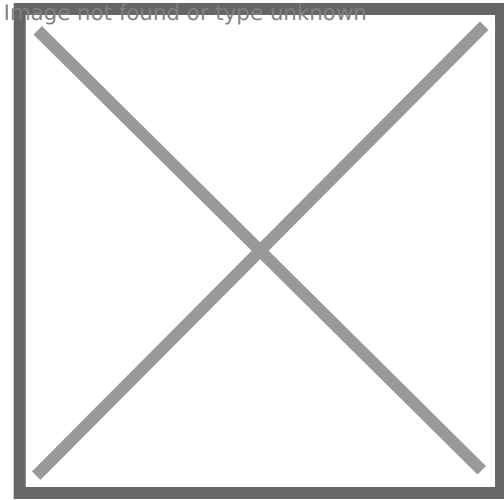
One could also say that we need to understand the motivations of each person making assertions

This kind of analysis of "bias and prejudice" is definitely a part of the legal frame of analysis.

So in short we could take your examples and generalize them into a series of bullet points on how generally to approach "methods of inference" in making judgments about the unknown.

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**Post by “Joshua” of March 16, 2022 at 1:38 PM**



[Did you know Vergil signs his name in the first four lines of the Aeneid?](#)

In 2012, the classicist Cristiano Castelletti discovered that Vergil included a boustrophedon acrostic in the first four lines of the Aeneid. An...

[www.reddit.com](http://www.reddit.com)

There ^ is interesting food for thought!

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**Post by “Don” of March 16, 2022 at 1:48 PM**

Boustrophedon is such a great word! 😊

Clever wordsmithing from those ancients!

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**Post by “Cassius” of March 16, 2022 at 2:10 PM**

NOW WAIT A MINUTE! 😊

Now we're going in **zig-zag** fashion to find the code?

And only two letters - the "V" and the "M" (in the wrong order!)- is referenced in "signing his name?"

#### Quote

Castelletti accounts for the inversion of Vergil's *tria nomina* (from [Publius] Vergilius Maro to [Publius] Maro Vergilius) by claiming that Vergil drew inspiration from the Greek poet Aratus, who included a similar acrostic sequence.

[Don](#), are you signing on to that one too?

I know I've been campaigning for years against skepticism but do I now need to worry I've gone overboard? Have I been too hard on poor Pyrrho?



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### Post by "Godfrey" of March 16, 2022 at 6:08 PM

I've got some monkeys typing away in my garage... I'll keep you posted.

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### Post by "Godfrey" of March 16, 2022 at 6:30 PM

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I am not sure what you mean there, however (?) I have a feeling that you are using the word "prolepsis" in that sentence as if it is interchangeable with "concept." I am still not ready to embrace that "anticipations" = "concepts." Are you?

Definitely not. My working theory of a prolepsis (anticipation) is twofold. The *faculty* itself is one of pattern recognition. An individual *anticipation* arises from the faculty and based on what has been input into it. That input begins in the womb and continues onward. The anticipation, in both cases, is an instantaneous reaction to an experience, but based on a person's input history it may vary from person to person.

So a child, or a person who has little interest in poetry, may react to the word "poem" (not think, as it's a reaction) "a bunch of lines that rhyme". But a poet, or a scholar of poetry, might react entirely differently (I can't say how, as I'm neither a poet nor a scholar!).

Could this be why there's a quote, I don't remember where, about only Greeks being able to learn the true philosophy? Among other things, other peoples don't have the "correct" anticipations.