

CLIMACTIC DELAY IN LUCRETIUS

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IN *PHOENIX* 44 (1990) 82–83, H. Jacobson took a fresh look at Lucretius' lines on the woman who, sincerely passionate in her lovemaking, seeks "common joys" (4.1195–96):

*nam facit ex animo saepe et, communia quaerens
gaudia, sollicitat spatium decurrere amoris*

Noting that the standard interpretation of *sollicitat* . . . *amoris* has the woman rousing or inciting her lover to run through or complete the course of love, Jacobson declares that such a reading is "almost intolerable in context."¹ Lucretius has just said that a woman does not always feign sexual excitement and passion (*nec mulier semper ficto suspirat amore*, 1192), so that when he now speaks of one who "does it from the heart" (*facit ex animo*) as "seeking common joys" he must mean that "she wants to have an orgasm herself during intercourse." Jacobson recalls that Ovid too lauds a woman's sincerity in lovemaking (*Ars Am.* 2.685–692) and offers advice on achieving mutual orgasm (*Ars Am.* 2.725–732). If, then, we believe that Lucretius is saying something here about the woman's sexual climax, "three avenues," as Jacobson puts it, "lie open to us": we might take *sollicitat* as intransitive ("she is anxious, eager"), or emend *sollicitat* to *sollicitast*, or, following a suggestion of H. D. Jocelyn, understand the entire phrase *spatium decurrere amoris* as the object of *sollicitat* ("she spurs on the completion of the course of love," in Jacobson's rendering), with "the reference being to both female and male orgasms."

Jacobson's main thesis is compelling, but none of his three suggested approaches to the passage is without difficulty. He admits that *sollicitare* is never intransitive in classical Latin, and that his *sollicitast* entails a use of the adjective with an infinitive which is attested first in silver Latin (Seneca and Silius); besides, a statement that the woman "is anxious to finish the course" is a bit flat, coming after *quaerens*, which presumably means "actively seeking."² And I must confess that I am not sure how to

¹He might have mentioned that this reading is enshrined in the the OLD s.v. *sollicito*, 6b: "(mulier) -at (sc. virum) spatium decurrere amoris . . ."

²A more aggressive reading might be obtained by emending *sollicitat* to *sollicita it*, "she moves excitedly to complete the course." Lucretius uses *sollicitus* of agitated, restless movement (*motus*) at 1.343, 5.1214, and 6.1038, and of lustful agitation in 5.45–46, *quantae tum scindunt hominem cuppedinis acres / sollicitum curae*; cf. also Hor. *Carm.* 3.7.9, *sollicitae . . . hospitae* (= the sexually aroused Chloe). For the predicative use of *sollicita* with *it*, cf. Ter. *Eun.* 919, *vide ut otiosus it*. For the elision in

construe the four Latin words to obtain Jocelyn's reading and Jacobson's translation.

I should like to propose a simple emendation of the line which will completely reverse the standard interpretation and secure the sort of meaning that Jacobson desiderates. Ovid provides the clue to what Lucretius may have written. In his own description of the honestly passionate woman (*Ars Am.* 2.685 ff., cited by Jacobson), he says that he likes to hear her begging him to delay and hold himself back in their lovemaking (689–690):

*me voces audire iuvat sua gaudia fassas
quaque morer meme sustineamque rogent.*

The obvious reason for such begging is that the woman does not want him to climax before she herself is ready to do so. In the same way, Lucretius' passionate woman, seeking "common joys," might be expected to ask her partner to slow down, to delay his climax, to wait for her, so that they may climax together. Read:

... *sollicitat spatium <haud> decurrere amoris*

"... she importunes him *not* to finish the course of love." For this *sollicito*, which will be similar to but stronger than Ovid's *rogo* in the passage quoted above, compare Ovid *Met.* 9.682–683, *vanis Telethusa maritum / sollicitat precibus, ne spem ponat in arto*; Pliny *Ep.* 6.14.1, *sollicitas me in Formianum; veniam ...*; Juv. 9.36–37, (*te*) *blandae adsiduae densaeque tabellae / sollicitent* (OLD s.v., 2b).³ The object of *sollicitat* may be readily understood from the context (cf. 1193, *virī corpus cum corpore iungit*). For the infinitival construction compare 5.945, [*eos*] *sedare sitim fluvii fontesque vocabant*, and see Bailey's notes on Lucretius' use of the infinitive (vol. 1, p. 101). As for the supplemental *haud*, there is of course a large number of small (and not so small) words missing from the Lucretian manuscripts.⁴ Just three lines earlier, an *et* has been lost (1191, *praetermittere <et> humanis*, Marullus), and an *aut* is missing at 4.327 (*quinque etiam <aut> sex*, Lachmann). The loss of *haud* in the present line may have been occasioned by the similarity and confusion of minuscule letters (*-um haud d-*).⁵ For *haud* with the infinitive, compare, e.g., Ter. *An.* 952: *illam me credo haud*

sollicita it, cf. Hor. *Sat.* 1.5.48, *lusum it Maecenas*. And for the infinitive of purpose, *decurrere*, cf., e.g., 3.895–896, *nec dulces occurrent oscula nati / praeripere*; Ter. *Hec.* 189, *it visere ad eam*; Prop. 1.1.12, *ibat ... videre feras*; 1.16.33–34, *pontum carpere remis / ibis*.

³On the other hand, *sollicitat ... haud decurrere* might refer to non-verbal delaying techniques.

⁴See S. B. Smith's long list of textual omissions, in W. E. Leonard and S. B. Smith (eds.), *T. Lucreti Cari. De Rerum Natura* (Madison 1965) 125, n. 67.

⁵Cf. Cic. *Leg.* 2.56.5, *quod <haud> procul* (Grotius); Rep. 1.1.16, *sunt <haud> procul* (Mai). But see L. Havet, *Manuel de critique verbale* (Paris 1911) 126 ff., on "Omission en apparence inconditionnée."

nosse; Cic. *Tusc.* 2.1.2, *Neoptolemus . . . philosophari sibi ait necesse esse, sed paucis; nam omnino haud placere*. And for the elision in *spatium haud*, compare 1.789, *facere haud* (= 2.750 and 5.552); Virgil *Aen.* 5.284, *operum haud*.

The standard reading of the received text saw in it a metaphor from horse-racing: the woman "rides" her partner, spurring him on to the finish.⁶ The same sort of metaphor might be seen in *sollicitat . . . <haud> decurrere*, with the woman reining in her partner. But a metaphor from racing on foot would seem to be better suited to the quest for "common joys." Compare Ovid *Ars Am.* 2.726-728:

*nec cursus anteat illa tuos:
ad metam properate simul: tum plena voluptas,
cum pariter victi femina virque iacent.*

Whichever kind of racing imagery is detected, the important point in the emended text, as in Jacobson's proposal, is that the woman who seeks "common joys" is actively concerned about her own orgasm.

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⁶See J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore 1982) 167. Cf. R. D. Brown, *Lucretius on Love and Sex* (Leiden 1987) 311.