

LUCRETIUS *DE RERUM NATURA* 5.849–854

In Bailey's 1947 edition these lines read as follows:

850 multa videmus enim rebus concurrere debere,
 ut propagando possint procudere saecula;
 pabula primum ut sint, genitalia deinde per artus
 semina qua possint membris manare remissis;
 feminaque ut maribus coniungi possit, habere
 mutua qui mutant inter se gaudia uterque.

850 *procudere l. 31: procludere OQ* 852 *possint O: possis Q remissis* remissa *Lachmann*
 853 *maribus l. 31; marius OQ habere* avere *Lachmann* 854 *mutent Bernays: metuent*
OQ: mutuaeque insinuent Lachmann

This is the same reading as his OCT² (1922) and he translates:

For we see that many happenings must be united for things, that they may be able to beget and propagate their races; first that they may have food, and then a way whereby birth-giving seeds may pass through their frames, and issue from their slackened limbs; and that woman may be joined with man, they must needs each have means whereby they can interchange mutual joys.

In other words (disregarding the variant readings for 850 and 852 which are irrelevant for this study) we have dependent upon 849–50 *primum ut sint pabula, deinde qua semina possint manare*, etc., and then in 853 we have to go into reverse, as it were, hold up the *feminaque ut . . .* clause as dependent on what follows it, understand *uterque* from the end of 854, and take it with *habere* as 'acc. and infin. taking the place of *ut sint* in 851' (Bailey, p. 1464).

Both the text and the interpretation of this passage must give rise to doubts as to their correctness. The involved and contorted interpretation is perhaps the more worrying of the two. At first sight one would expect the *femina ut . . . possit* of 853 to correspond to the *pabula primum ut sint* of 851 and depend, like it, directly on 849–50, but this is what the commentators and translators of the past 460 years have consistently refused to do. Bailey's translation represents the view of this passage which has been orthodox since the early sixteenth century and which is still to be found in the recent Loeb version revised by Martin Smith, except that he realizes that *femina* means any female animal and that 851–2 (*genitalia . . . remissis*) apply to the male only, which I am sure is right. But of this more later.

The text itself, however, cannot be regarded as above suspicion. G. B. Townend in his article, 'Some Problems of Punctuation in the Latin Hexameter' (*CQ* N.S. 19 (1969), 330–44) has shown that breaks in the line at this point in the fifth foot are by no means as common as the editors of Lucretius still assume. In fact he says (p. 338), 'In short, it may be claimed with some confidence that, except where the run of the sentence is absolutely clear (as in 3.79–80), a sense-break before the last word can never be assumed. I should go further and assert that nowhere in Lucretius is there a sentence whose meaning is determined by the presence of a comma.' These are strong words and if they are justified, and Townend finds ample evidence to justify them, then the *habere* at the end of 853 must arouse suspicion. In the orthodox version there is a clear sense-break

and the comma is essential; on the other hand, what can be made of the line if we omit the comma?

This was one of the considerations which prompted Lachmann to attempt a radical emendation of these lines. (The Juntine *babendum* of 1512-13, rejected by Lambinus in his edition of 1570 and revived only by Creech in 1695 is merely an attempt to simplify the interpretation, which remained substantially unaltered; it leaves the sense-break unchanged.) Lachmann, however, considering that all previous editors had neglected the structure of the sentence, and ignored the passage on mutual pleasure in 4.1195 (better, 1192-1207), concluded that 'nihil facilius erat quam veram poetae manum certissima ratione restituere'. He altered *remissis* to *remissa* in 852 and for 853-4 read:

feminaque ut maribus coniungi possit *avere*,
mutuaque insinuent inter se gaudia uterque.

Leaving aside the change in 852, which is not relevant to this paper, it has to be conceded that his reading of 853-4 does vastly improve the run of the sentence. For the first time in centuries the *ut . . . possit* clause can be taken in its natural place, i.e. directly dependent on 845-50, and not treated as subordinate to what follows, and, of course, the break in the fifth foot of 853 is removed. His text would presumably translate:

and (thirdly) that the female may be able to want to be joined to males and both may introduce mutual joys to one another.

For all his confidence Lachmann found no followers. Monro dismissed *avere* in his fourth edition (Cambridge, 1886) calling *coniungi possit avere* 'a most awkward phrase: the wish of the woman is irrelevant', and Bailey's verdict (p. 1464) was that '(Lachmann) was wide of the mark in reading *avere*, *mutuaque insinuent*.' Both reverted to the MS *habere*, and to the traditional interpretation of these lines. One must say, with some regret, that they were almost certainly right to reinstate the MS reading. It is not easy to see how, palaeographically, *avere* could ever have given rise to the very clear *habere* of both O and Q. And Munro has a point, ('ut femina maribus) coniungi possit *avere*' is very awkward, and is it likely that Lucretius wrote it? He uses various parts of *avere*, though never the infinitive, thirteen times in all, but is the mention of the female's desire really relevant here? Surely he is listing the *physical* necessities for procreation, food, the male sexual organs, and the third requirement. It is true that in the long discussion of sex in Book 4 the passage referred to by Lachmann does state that the female often welcomes intercourse (in which passage, incidentally, we find *canes discedere aventes*), but here, with no parallel mention of the male desire, which is surely equally, or even more, important, the introduction of female desire seems completely out of place. Lachmann's *avere*, in spite of its obvious advantages, must with regret be rejected and with it his beginning of 854. The OQ reading is clearly wrong but Bernays's *mutent* makes good sense with far less violence to the MS tradition.

We return, then, to what can be called the standard reading of these lines but we need not, I suggest, return to the standard contorted interpretation. It is possible to take this passage in a way which does not interfere with the natural flow of the Latin (a point of paramount importance in Lucretius, as Townend insists) and which, although it assumes a slight pause, and an asyndeton, at this point of the fifth foot in 853, nevertheless introduces nothing that cannot be

defended as consistent with Lucretian usage. Leonard and Smith pointed the way to a new, more satisfactory, understanding of these lines in 1942. Printing practically the same text as Bailey they translate:

first, that there may be food, then (that there may be passages) by which the creative seeds throughout the frame can stream from the relaxed limbs, and (lastly) that the female may be able to mate with the male (and) that each (can) have (the means) whereby they exchange in common the mutual delights (of love).

'The Latin', they comment, 'is extremely awkward'. The string of parentheses they have inserted certainly make it appear so, but I would suggest, firstly, that most of these, considering that this is Lucretius, are unnecessary, and secondly, that a different, less involved, rendering of 854 is possible and, indeed, comparatively simple.

To take 853 first, they note that there is 'no connective between *coniungi* and *habere*, although the two infinitives seem to depend equally on *possit*'. I feel sure that this latter point is correct, necessitating a slight pause after *possit*, but I doubt whether this contradicts Townend's observations quoted at the beginning of this paper. There is no real sense-break, *possit* governs both infinitives equally, and the only slight 'awkwardness' is the asyndeton. Lucretian rules can never be rigid; breaks at this point in the line are not unknown, e.g. 3.288 'sumit, in ira | cum fervescit'; 3.548 'pars una, loco quae | fixa manet certo'; and a very close parallel to these lines in 1.787-8.

nec cessare haec inter se mutare, meare
a caelo ad terram, de terra ad sidera mundi

where both *mutare* and *meare* depend on *cessare*.

After their good start with 853, however, Leonard and Smith falter and allow themselves to be deluded by the traditional rendering. They comment, '*uterque*. Either is subject of *possit habere* or is in distributive apposition to the understood subject of *mutent*.' Of these two alternatives they chose the former for their translation and this is clearly wrong; it produces a version little less involved than the standard one. They did not realize that Lucretius has dealt with the male requirement in 851-2 and that in 853-4 he is concerned exclusively with what the female must have for conception to take place. *Uterque* is not the subject of *possit*; this is still *femina* (nor need it be 'in apposition to the understood subject of *mutent*', *uterque* with a plural verb is common enough). The translation of these lines should be:

and (it is necessary thirdly) that the female should be able to mate with males and have wherewith they may both exchange mutual joys between themselves.

In other words, the necessities for the propagation of the species are three. The first is food, the second is the male organ; these are dealt with in 851-2. Thirdly, the female must have her organ, the place for mutual delight. The only possible awkwardness in this interpretation is the asyndeton between *coniungi* and *habere*. Accept that, and all difficulties are resolved.