

## LUCRETIVS 4.1192-96

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*nec mulier semper ficto suspirat amore  
 quae complexa viri corpus cum corpore iungit  
 et tenet adsuctis umectans oscula labris;  
 nam facit ex animo saepe et, communia quaerens  
 gaudia, sollicitat spatium decurrere amoris.*

AS FAR AS I KNOW, readers are in agreement as to the meaning of *sollicitat spatium decurrere amoris*. Representative translations are those of M. F. Smith, "she rouses him to run the full course in the lists of love" (Cambridge, Mass. 1975, Loeb Classical Library) and R. D. Brown, "[she] incites him to complete the course of love."<sup>1</sup> This presumably indicates, as J. N. Adams puts it,<sup>2</sup> "unspecified acts (and words?) of stimulation used by the female." The traditional view is supported by the fact that *sollicito* is commonly used in sexual contexts in some such sense (see Adams 184-185) and also because it is a transitive verb. Nonetheless, I find such a view almost intolerable in context. That *sollicitat* in fact has no personal object specified here is a small objection, but it should at least be noted. More serious is the sense—or lack thereof. The point of lines 1192-96 seems clear. Women, Lucretius says, are sometimes sincere in their lovemaking and do not always "fake it" (*ficto suspirat amore*). They do occasionally seek *communia gaudia*. Now, both the reported history of Western sex and Latin literature of the first century make it clear what this means. Ovid too speaks well of the woman who is sincere in her lovemaking and wants to have an orgasm herself as well (AA 2.685-692). And at AA 2.725-730 he suggests that ideally male and female should climax at the same time. Thus, the point of Lucretius' words must be not that the sincere female lover stimulates the male lover to have an orgasm, but rather that she wants to have an orgasm herself during intercourse. If one believes that this must be what Lucretius means, then three avenues lie open to us. The first possibility: *sollicitat* should be taken as intransitive ("she is anxious, eager"). I know no classical examples, but in later Latin the verb is so

<sup>1</sup>R. D. Brown, *Lucretius on Love and Sex* (Leiden 1987) 157.

<sup>2</sup>J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore 1982) 185.

used.<sup>3</sup> One can credit this more readily for Lucretius since, as Bailey notes (1.105), "Lucretius not infrequently uses verbs which are normally transitive in an intransitive or absolute or quasi-passive sense." Otherwise, we might choose to emend. For *sollicitat* read *sollicitast*. The adjective is fairly common in Lucretius and its use with the infinitive is well attested (though not in Lucretius), e.g., Sen. *Hipp.* 976, *non sollicitus prodesse bonis*; Silius *Pun.* 7.442, *tempora sollicitus litis servasse*. Finally, Professor Jocelyn, who agrees with me that Lucretius "must be talking about the female's orgasm" (*per. litt.*, 9 April 1989), suggests that the whole phrase *spatium decurrere amoris* might be the object of *sollicitat*, i.e., "she spurs on the completion of the course of love" (my translation), the reference being to both female and male orgasms.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>See H. Rönisch, *Itala und Vulgata*<sup>2</sup> (Munich 1965) 380, citing *ne sollicitate* ("do not be anxious") at Luke 12:22 and Matt. 6:31.

<sup>4</sup>I am indebted to Professor Jocelyn for this suggestion and other helpful comments.