

Episode Sixty-Two - The Perils of Romantic Love (Part 2)

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Welcome to Episode Sixty-Two of Lucretius Today.

I am your host Cassius, and together with my panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the six books of Lucretius' poem, and discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and we suggest the best place to start is the book, "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

For anyone who is not familiar with our podcast, please check back to [Episode One](#) for a discussion of our goals and our ground rules. If you have any question about that, please be sure to contact us at EpicureanFriends.com for more information.

In this Episode 62 we will continue our discussion of perils of romantic love.

Our text today is Latin Lines -1141-1208 - of Book Four.

Munro Notes

1141-1191: if there are such evils in prosperous, what must be the evils of unsuccessful love? strive then not to fall into love; but if you are caught, use all efforts to escape : yet men stand in their own way, and deluded find beauties even in defects ; the discarded lover will refuse all comfort; who yet, if received back, will find out his folly and be glad to get away again.

1192 - 1208: yet women sometimes feel true love in return.

Browne 1743

These are the misfortunes that attend an amour ever so fortunate and constant; but the miseries of a wretched and disastrous love are innumerable, and obvious to everyone with his eyes open. You had better therefore be upon your guard beforehand, and observe the rules I have laid down to prevent your being caught; for 'tis not so difficult to avoid being drawn into the snares of love as to disengage yourself from the net when you are taken, and to break through the strong knots which Venus ties close upon all her votaries.

And though you are entangled and within the net, you may still avoid much of the evil, unless you willfully set yourself against the remedy. First then, you are to take no notice of any imperfections, either of mind or body, you find in the mistress you admire and fondly love. All lovers, blinded by their passion, observe this, and attribute beauties to the fair to which they

have no real pretence; and therefore the ugly and deformed we see have their several charms, and secure a sovereign power over their admirers. The lover that has such a forbidding Dowdy for a mistress is laughed at by his companions, who advise him to appease Venus and render her propitious, while they think nothing of their greater misfortunes in placing their esteem upon others less lovely and less beautiful. The black seems brown; the nasty and rank is negligent, the owl-eyed is a Pallas, the sinewy, with her dry skin, is a little Doe, the dwarf, of the Pygmy Breed, is one of the Graces, wit and spirit all over; the large and gigantic is surprising and full of majesty. If she stammers and cannot speak, then she lisps; she is modest if she is dumb; but the Turbulent, the violent and the talkative is all Fire. If she is worn away with a consumption, she is my Slender Love, you may span her in the waist if she is dying with a cough. The two-handed Virago, with her full Duggs, is Ceres herself, a bedfellow for Bacchus; the flat-nosed is my Silene, a little Satyr; the pouting lip is a very Kiss. It would be endless to say all that might be offered upon this subject.

But allow your mistress all the advantages of beauty in her face, that charms of love arise from every limb, yet there are others as lovely as she, and time was when you lived without her, and we know she plays the same game that homelier women can do as well. And then she perfumes, rank as she is with filthy smells, that her maids cannot come near her, but make a jest of her when they are not seen. But when the lover is shut out, and all in tears crowns the gates with flowers and garlands, and pours ointments upon the stately pillars, and the wretch warms the very doors with his kisses; yet when he is admitted, and one blast from her armpits strikes full upon him as he enters, he presently seeks for a plausible reason to be gone, and all his long-labored speeches of complaint are forgotten, and he condemns himself of folly for raising such ideas of her beauty, which no mortal could lay claim to. This secret is well known to women of the town, and they act cunningly behind the scenes as it were, and conceal their failings from those whose love they would secure fixed and lasting to themselves. But all to no purpose, for you may easily imagine how things are, and discover all, and prevent their utmost endeavors to deceive you. And if your mistress be of an open temper, and not sullen and reserved, she will not so much as hide her defects, but hope you will allow for imperfections that are common to the whole sex.

Nor does the woman always breathe with feigned desire when joined in strict embrace with him she loves, when she holds him close, and on his pressed lips imprints her balmy kisses; for she often does it heartily, and strives to share the common joy, and run the heats with vigor to the goal. Nor for any other reason would birds and herds and wild beasts and cattle and mares bear the weight of the male if they did not burn and rage with equal heat, and so receive with joy the lusty leap. Don't you observe how those whom mutual pleasure has bound fast are tortured as it were in common bonds? How dogs in the street are striving to untie the knot and pull with all their might a different way, yet they stick fast in the strong ties of love? This they would never do if not engaged in mutual joys, which cheat them with delight and hold them fast. The pleasure then is common to them both.

Munro 1886

And these evils are found in love that is lasting and highly prosperous; but in crossed and hopeless love are ills such as you may seize with closed eyes, past numbering; so that it is better to watch before-hand in the manner I have prescribed, and be on your guard not to be drawn in. For to avoid falling into the toils of love is not so hard as, after you are caught, to get out of the nets you are in and to break through the strong meshes of Venus. And yet even when you are entangled and held fast you may escape the mischief, unless you stand in your own way and begin by overlooking all the defects of her mind or those of her body, whoever it is whom you court and woo. For this men usually do, blinded by passion, and attribute to the beloved those advantages which are not really theirs. We therefore see women in ways manifold deformed and ugly to be objects of endearment and held in the highest admiration.

And one lover jeers at others and advises them to propitiate Venus, since they are troubled by a disgraceful passion, and often, poor wretch, gives no thought to his own ills greatest of all. The black is a brune, the filthy and rank has not the love of order; the cat-eyed is a miniature Pallas, the stringy and wizened a gazelle; the dumpy and dwarfish is one of the graces, from top to toe all grace; the big and overgrown is awe-inspiring and full of dignity. She is tongue-tied, cannot speak, then she has a lisp; the dumb is bashful; then the fire-spit, the teasing, the gossiping turns to a shining lamp. One becomes a slim darling then when she cannot live from want of flesh; and she is only spare, who is half-dead with cough. Then the fat and big-breasted is a Ceres' self big-breasted from Iacchus; the pug-nosed is a she Silenus and a satyress; the thick-lipped a very kiss. It were tedious to attempt to report other things of the kind.

Let her however be of ever so great dignity of appearance; such that the power of Venus goes forth from all her limbs; yet there are others too; yet have we lived without her before; yet does she do, and we know that she does, in all things the same as the ugly woman; and fumigates herself, poor wretch, with nauseous perfumes, her very maids running from her and giggling behind her back. But the lover, when shut out, often in tears covers the threshold with flowers and wreaths, and anoints the haughty doorposts with oil of marjoram; and imprints kisses, poor wretch, on the doors. When however he has been admitted, if on his approach but one single breath should come in his way, he would seek specious reasons for departing, and the long-conned deep drawn complaint would fall to the ground; and then he would blame his folly on seeing that he had attributed to her more than it is right to concede to a mortal. Nor is this unknown to our Venuses; wherefore all the more they themselves hide with the utmost pains all that goes on behind the scenes of life from those whom they wish to retain in the chains of love; but in vain, since you may yet draw forth from her mind into the light all these things and search into all her smiles; and if she is of a fair mind and not troublesome, overlook them in your turn and make allowance for human failings.

Nor does the woman sigh always with feigned passion, when she locks in her embrace and joins with her body the man's body and holds it, sucking his lips into her lips and drinking in his kisses. Often she does it from the heart, and seeking mutual joys courts him to run the complete race of love. And in no other way could birds, cattle, wild beasts, sheep and mares submit to bear the males, except because the very exuberance of nature in the females is in heat and burns and joyously draws in the Venus of the covering males. See you not too how

those whom mutual pleasure has chained are often tortured in their common chains? How often in the highways do dogs, desiring to separate, eagerly pull different ways with all their might, while all the time they are held fast in the strong fetters of Venus! This they would never do, unless they experienced mutual joys strong enough to force them into the snare and hold them in its meshes. Wherefore again and again I repeat there is a common pleasure.

Bailey 1921

And these ills are found in love that is true and fully prosperous; but when love is crossed and hopeless there are ills, which you might detect even with closed eyes, ills without number; so that it is better to be on the watch beforehand, even as I have taught you, and to beware that you be not entrapped. For to avoid being drawn into the meshes of love, is not so hard a task as when caught amid the toils to issue out and break through the strong bonds of Venus. And yet even when trammelled and fettered you might escape the snare, unless you still stand in your own way, and at the first o'erlook all the blemishes of mind and body in her, whom you seek and woo. For for the most part men act blinded by passion, and assign to women excellencies which are not truly theirs. And so we see those in many ways deformed and ugly dearly loved, yea, prospering in high favour.

And one man laughs at another, and urges him to appease Venus, since he is wallowing in a base passion, yet often, poor wretch, he cannot see his own ills, far greater than the rest. A black love is called 'honey-dark', the foul and filthy 'unadorned', the green-eyed 'Athena's image', the wiry and wooden 'a gazelle', the squat and dwarfish 'one of the graces', 'all pure delight', the lumpy and ungainly 'a wonder', and 'full of majesty'. She stammers and cannot speak, 'she has a lisp'; the dumb is 'modest'; the fiery, spiteful gossip is 'a burning torch'. One becomes a 'slender darling', when she can scarce live from decline; another half dead with cough is 'frail'. Then the fat and full-bosomed is 'Ceres' self with Bacchus at breast'; the snub-nosed is 'sister to Silenus, or a Satyr'; the thick-lipped is 'a living kiss'. More of this sort it were tedious for me to try to tell.

But yet let her be fair of face as you will, and from her every limb let the power of Venus issue forth: yet surely there are others too: surely we have lived without her before, surely she does just the same in all things, and we know it, as the ugly, and of herself, poor wretch, reeks of noisome smells, and her maids flee far from her and giggle in secret. But the tearful lover, denied entry, often smothers the threshold with flowers and garlands, and anoints the haughty door-posts with marjoram, and plants his kisses, poor wretch, upon the doors; yet if, admitted at last, one single breath should meet him as he comes, he would seek some honest pretext to be gone, and the deep-drawn lament long-planned would fall idle, and then and there he would curse his folly, because he sees that he has assigned more to her than it is right to grant to any mortal. Nor is this unknown to our queens of love; nay the more are they at pains to hide all behind the scenes from those whom they wish to keep fettered in love; all for naught, since you can even so by thought bring it all to light and seek the cause of all this laughter, and if she is of a fair mind, and not spiteful, o'erlook faults in your turn, and pardon human weaknesses.

Nor does the woman sigh always with feigned love, when clasping her lover she holds him fast, showering her kisses. For often she does it from the heart, and yearning for mutual joys she woos him to reach the goal of love. And in no other way would birds, cattle, wild beasts, the flocks, and mares be able to submit to the males, except because their nature too is afire, and is burning to overflow. Do you not see too how those whom mutual pleasure has bound, are often tortured in their common chains? Wherefore, again and again, as I say, the pleasure is common.