

Under the Sliding Signs of Heaven-Lucretius' Poetic Echoes

Post by "Joshua" of August 25, 2019 at 2:30 PM

I've been going through Lucretius line by line in Latin. ([Latin Per Diem](#) on YouTube is an excellent resource for this if you're curious.) I noticed an interesting pattern in the early lines;

Quote

Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divomque voluptas,
alma Venus, caeli subter labentia signa
quae mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis
concelebras...

The verb *concelebras* clearly acts on *mare* and *terras* as the objects. But the word also seems to echo aurally (to my ear at least) the earlier phrase, *caeli subter labentia signa*. (*Under the sliding signs of heaven [i.e. the stars]*). I spent four years studying poetry, and it's possible I'm reading too much into this; but it seems to me that the poet is attempting to draw a connection between these two elements in the text. Note the significant consonants.

Caeli subter **LaBentia Signa**

Conce**LeBraS**

If there is a connection, it's a fascinating one. *Concelebras* means "cause to teem" or "cause to be filled with", here in reference to Venus filling the sea and land with life. But the subtle echo with "the sliding stars of heaven" might stretch the verb here, to include the indirect object. Thus, under my new interpretation, he is hinting that Venus (meaning generative passion) also "caused to teem" with life the other worlds!

As a side note; I've tried to "crack" Latin in a number of different ways over the years, but I've never studied it with so much pleasure as when I study Lucretius. My process here is to

1. Memorize sections of text
2. Learn to "read" each sentence in Latin for understanding, *in Latin*.
3. Work through the passage throughout the day (like when I'm driving), saying each word slowly and really "seeing" it in my mind. So when I read *mare navigerum*, I "see" the sea laden

with ships instead of thinking "*sea laden with ships*" in English in my head.

And even if I never learn enough Latin to read Cicero, I will in compensation always have a little Lucretius wherever I go. It's been great fun!

-josh

Post by "Cassius" of August 25, 2019 at 3:19 PM

Sounds like you are right!

This is a huge subject. I keep hearing that the Latin form of poetry is based on pacing and stressing, rather than rhyming words at the end of the line. I am woefully incompetent to talk about this but maybe others are.

Post by "Joshua" of August 25, 2019 at 3:28 PM

It is a very large subject, Cassius! There's enough here for a lifetime of close reading. My little Latin pocket Dictionary needs an upgrade, though 😊