

**Lucan**

**The Civil War (Pharsalia)**

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## Contents

Book I:1-32	The nature of the war
Book I:33-66	Homage to Nero
Book I:67-97	The motives of the leaders
Book I:98-157	Caesar and Pompey
Book I:158-182	The hidden causes of the war
Book I:183-227	Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon
Book I:228-265	Entry into Ariminum (Rimini)
Book I:266-351	The exiled tribunes: Caesar's speech
Book I:352-391	Laelius' speech
Book I:392-465	Caesar gathers his forces
Book I:466-525	Fear and apprehension in Rome
Book I:526-583	Ghosts and portents
Book I:584-637	Arruns reads the future
Book I:638-672	Figulus reads the heavens
Book I:673-695	Apollo inspires a prophecy
Book II:1-66	Rome in turmoil
Book II:67-138	History recalled - Marius
Book II:139-233	History recalled - Sulla
Book II:234-285	Marcus Junius Brutus the Younger
Book II:286-325	Marcus Porcius Cato the Younger
Book II:326-349	Marcia
Book II:350-391	Cato's morality
Book II:392-438	Pompey bases himself at Capua
Book II:439-461	Caesar advances
Book II:462-525	Defeat of Pompey's generals
Book II:526-595	Pompey's speech to the army
Book II:596-649	Pompey flees to Brindisi
Book II:650-703	Caesar lays siege to Brindisi
Book II:704-736	Pompey escapes by sea
Book III:1-45	Pompey's vision of Julia
Book III:46-83	Caesar marches on Rome
Book III:84-140	Lucius Metellus defends the treasury
Book III:141-168	The treasury is seized
Book III:169-213	Greece and Asia Minor rally to Pompey
Book III:214-263	The Middle East and India rally to Pompey

Book III:264-297 The Black Sea and North Africa rally to Pompey  
Book III:298-357 Marseille opposes Caesar  
Book III:358-398 Caesar blockades the city  
Book III:399-452 Caesar destroys the sacred grove  
Book III:453-496 Caesar leaves for Spain, the siege continues  
Book III:497-537 The Romans initiate a naval battle  
Book III:538-582 The fleets engage  
Book III:583-634 The death of Catus  
Book III:635-669 The death of Lycidas  
Book III:670-708 The death of Phoceus  
Book III:709-751 The death of Argus  
Book III:752-762 Decimus wins the encounter  
Book IV:1-47 Caesar attacks Ilerda (Lleida) in Spain  
Book IV:48-120 Caesar's camp is flooded  
Book IV:121-156 The campaign is renewed  
Book IV:157-207 A temporary peace  
Book IV:208-253 Petreius recalls his men to duty  
Book IV:254-318 Caesar lays siege to the enemy camp  
Book IV:319-362 Lucius Afranius surrenders  
Book IV:363-401 Pompey's army in Spain disbands  
Book IV:402-447 Conflict in Dalmatia  
Book IV:448-528 An incident at sea  
Book IV:529-581 Vulteius and his men commit suicide  
Book IV:582-660 The myth of Hercules and Antaeus  
Book IV:661-714 Pompey's African army under Varus  
Book IV:715-787 Juba's army defeats Curio  
Book IV:788-824 The spectre of corruption  
Book V:1-70 Lentulus addresses the senators  
Book V:71-101 The Shrine of Apollo at Delphi  
Book V:102-140 Appius Claudius reopens the shrine  
Book V:141-197 The priestess prophesies  
Book V:198- 236 The fate of Appius  
Book V:237-299 Caesar's troops on the verge of mutiny  
Book V:300-373 He quells the mutiny  
Book V:374-402 Caesar becomes dictator  
Book V:403-460 He sails for Chaonia  
Book V:461-503 Caesar summons Mark Antony

Book V:504-576 Caesar braves the sea  
Book V:577-637 The tempest  
Book V:638-677 Caesar reaches Illyria again  
Book V:678-721 Caesar's fleet reaches Nymphaion  
Book V:722-760 Pompey speaks to Cornelia his wife  
Book V:761-815 Cornelia replies  
Book VI:1-27 Pompey defends Dyrrachium (Durrës)  
Book VI:28-63 Caesar hems Pompey in  
Book VI:64-117 Both camps afflicted  
Book VI:118-195 Scaeva's heroism at Minicius  
Book VI:196-262 Scaeva slays Aulus  
Book VI:263-313 Pompey attacks, Caesar retreats  
Book VI:314-380 Caesar heads for Thessaly  
Book VI:381-412 The accursed land  
Book VI:413-506 Thessalian witchcraft  
Book VI:507-568 The witch Erictho  
Book VI:569-623 Sextus seeks her aid  
Book VI:624-666 The cave of Erictho  
Book VI:667-718 Erictho invokes the infernal powers  
Book VI:719-774 She raises the dead to prophesy  
Book VI:775-830 The prophecy of the dead  
Book VII:1-44 Pompey's dream  
Book VII:45-86 Cicero's speech  
Book VII:87-130 Pompey's reply  
Book VII:131-184 Preparations and omens  
Book VII:185-214 The augur's cry  
Book VII:215-234 Pompey deploys his army  
Book VII:235-302 Caesar addresses his men  
Book VII:303-336 Caesar launches the attack  
Book VII:337-384 Pompey addresses his men  
Book VII:385-459 The effects of Pharsalia  
Book VII:460-505 Battle is joined  
Book VII:506-544 Caesar destroys Pompey's cavalry  
Book VII:545-596 Caesar seizes victory  
Book VII:597-646 'A whole world died'  
Book VII:647-697 Pompey takes flight  
Book VII:698-727 Pompey reaches Larissa

Book VII:728-780 The field of corpses  
Book VII:781-824 Caesar denies the enemy dead burial  
Book VII:825-872 Philippi anticipated  
Book VIII:1-85 Pompey journeys to Lesbos  
Book VIII:86-108 Cornelia speaks  
Book VIII:109-158 Pompey sails from Lesbos  
Book VIII:159-201 Navigation by the stars  
Book VIII:202-255 Deiotarus' mission  
Book VIII:256-330 Pompey at Syhedra (*Sedra*)  
Book VIII:331-455 Lentulus rejects Pompey's plans  
Book VIII:456-535 Pompey reaches Egypt  
Book VIII:536-636 The murder of Pompey  
Book VIII:637-662 Cornelia laments  
Book VIII:663-711 The severed head  
Book VIII:712-822 Pompey's grave  
Book VIII:823-870 A curse on Egypt  
Book IX:1-50 Cato imbued with Pompey's spirit  
Book IX:51-116 Cornelia's departure from Egypt  
Book IX:117-166 Pompey's sons  
Book IX:167-214 Cato eulogises Pompey  
Book IX:215-252 Pompey's men prepare to defect  
Book IX:253-293 Cato wins them over  
Book IX:294-347 The fleet reaches Lake Tritonis  
Book IX:348-410 Lake Tritonis: Cato's speech  
Book IX:411-462 North Africa  
Book IX:463-510 The sandstorm  
Book IX:511-586 The Temple of Ammon (*The oracle of Amun at Siwa*)  
Book IX:587-618 Cato's leadership  
Book IX:619-699 The tale of Perseus and Medusa  
Book IX:700-760 The Libyan serpents  
Book IX:761-788 The death of Sabellus  
Book IX:789-838 Further deaths by snake-bite  
Book IX:839-889 The soldiers' heroic endurance  
Book IX:890-937 The Psylli combat the snakes  
Book IX:938-986 Caesar visits the site of Troy  
Book IX:987-1063 Caesar sails to Egypt  
Book IX:1064-1108 Caesar feigns grief at Pompey's death

Book X:1-52 Alexander's grave  
Book X:53-103 Caesar's infatuation with Cleopatra  
Book X:104-135 Cleopatra's splendour  
Book X:136-193 The banquet  
Book X:194-267 The cause of the Nile flood  
Book X:268-331 The source of the Nile  
Book X:332-433 Pothinus conspires against Caesar  
Book X:434-485 The conspirators attack  
Book X:486-546 Caesar prepares to escape by sea

### **Book I:1-32 The nature of the war**

I sing of a worse than civil war, of war fought between kinsmen over Pharsalia's plains, of wickedness deemed justice; of how a powerful people turned their own right hands against themselves; of strife within families; how, with the first Triumvirate broken, the forces of the quivering globe contended in mutual sinfulness; standard ranged against standard, eagle matched against eagle, spear threatening spear. What madness, my countrymen, how wild that slaughter! With Crassus' spirit still wandering un-avenged, while it was yet your duty to strip proud Parthia of Italian spoils, you chose instead to grant our enemies the sight of Roman strife, waging a war that could win no triumphs! With that blood, alas, spilled by Roman hands, what lands and seas might not have been won, where night hides the stars and the sun rises, where fiery air parches the south, where the winter's cold that no spring can thaw freezes the Black Sea in its icy grip! China might have passed under our yoke, savage Armenia, and those peoples who know the secret of the Nile's hidden source. If Rome, then, has such a love of illicit war, let her yet bring the whole earth under her rule, before turning on herself; she has never yet lacked enemies. If in Roman cities now the roofs and walls are half-demolished, and the vast stones of shattered houses litter the earth; if dwellings are untenanted, and scarcely a soul strays through the ancient sites; if Italy's unploughed soil is overgrown with thorns, year by year, and the fields cry out in vain for men to till them, such vast ruin is not due to proud Pyrrhus, or Hannibal; no foreign sword could thrust so deep: those blows from the hands of kinfolk strike home.

### **Book I:33-66 Homage to Nero**

Yet we'll complain no more, you gods, if fate could find no other way to Nero's advent, if even the eternal kingdom cost you dear, and Jupiter the Thunderer could not rule without warring with fierce giants, even such wickedness and crime is not too high a price to pay. Let Pharsalia's dire plains be heaped with dead; let Hannibal's shade



revel in the carnage; let final battle be joined at fatal Munda. Though Perusia's famine, Mutina's horrors, the ships sunk at stormy Actium, the war with the slaves near burning Etna, be added, still Rome owes a deep debt to civil war, since what was done, Caesar, was all for you. When your role on earth is over and at last you seek the stars, the celestial palace you expect will welcome you, the heavens rejoice. Whether you wield Jove's sceptre, or mount Phoebus' fiery chariot circling, with your shifting flame, an earth unafraid of this new sun, every deity will yield to you, and nature leave you to choose what god you wish to be, and where you wish to set your universal throne. Yet do not place it in the north, or where the hot opposing skies of the south incline, from there your light would fall aslant on Rome. If you lean on any one region of immense space, the axis will feel the weight; balance heaven by holding the centre of the sphere. Let all that region of the sky be clear, and no cloud hide our sight of Caesar. Then let the human race lay down its arms, consider its own good, and let all nations love one another; let Peace fly over the earth, and shut tight the iron gates of warlike Janus. Yet to me you are already divine; and were my heart inspired by you, I'd not trouble the god of sacred Delphi, or summon Bacchus from Nysa: you alone grant power to Roman verse.

### **Book I:67-97 The motives of the leaders**

My mind is moved to set down the cause of these great events. Vast the task before me, to show what impelled a frenzied people to arms, and drove peace from the earth. It was a chain of fatal happenings, the swift and painful collapse of excessive weight, a Rome unable to bear her own greatness. So when the fabric of the world dissolves, in that final hour that gathers in the ages, reverting to primal chaos, star will clash with star in confusion, the fiery constellations will sink into the sea, and earth heaving upwards her flat shores will throw off the ocean, the moon will move counter to her brother, and claiming the rule of day disdain to drive her chariot on its slanting path, and the whole discordant frame of the shattered firmament will break free of every law. Great things destroy themselves: such is the limit the gods place

on all success. It was not Fortune fuelling the envy of foreign nations against a people that ruled earth and sea: you, Rome, were the cause of your own ills, made a servant of three masters, when supreme power, never so shared before, forged a deadly pact. O, evilly joined together, blinded by excessive greed, to what end did those three unite their strength to rule the world between them? While earth buoys up the sea and the heavens the earth, while the sun revolves in his endless task, while night, in the sky above, follows day through the same circuit of the twelve constellations, no loyalty between sharers in tyranny; power endures no partner. Seek the evidence in no other nation: no long searching for fatal instances: Rome's first walls were drenched in a brother's blood. Nor was the prize of such madness a dominion over land and sea, the narrow bounds of a sanctuary for criminals caused the conflict.

### **Book I:98-157 Caesar and Pompey**

For a short while a discordant harmony was maintained, there was peace despite the leaders' wills, since Crassus stood between them, a check to imminent war. So the slender Isthmus divides the waves, and separates two seas, forbidding their waters to merge; and yet if the land were withdrawn, the Ionian would break on the Aegean. Thus when Crassus, who kept those fierce competitors apart, died pitifully, drenching Syrian Carrhae with Roman blood, that defeat by Parthia let loose the furies on Rome. In that battle the Parthians wrought better than they knew, visiting civil war on the defeated. Power was divided by the sword; the wealth of an imperial people who ruled the sea, the land, possessed the globe, was not enough for two. For now, when Julia, Caesar's daughter, Pompey's wife, was cut down by fate, she bore with her to the Shades the bonds of affinity, and a marriage turned, by that dread omen, to mourning. She, if fate had granted her longer life, might alone have restrained her husband's anger on the one side, and her father's on the other. She might have struck aside their swords, made them clasp hands, as the Sabine women stood between their husbands and their fathers and brought about reconciliation. But at her death bonds of loyalty were broken, and the generals freed to pursue armed conflict.

A powerful rivalry drove them on: for Pompey feared fresh exploits might obscure his former triumphs, his ridding the seas of pirates yielding second place to Caesar's victories in Gaul; while Caesar, used to battle, inured to endless effort, was driven by an ambition that yearned for supremacy; Caesar could accept none above him, Pompey no equal. It is wrong to ask who had the greatest right to seek war; each had great authority to support him: if the victor had the gods on his side, the defeated had Cato. The contest was unequal, Pompey being somewhat past his prime, long used to the toga and forgetting in peace how to play a general's part; courting adulation, lavish with his gifts to the people of Rome, swayed by popularity, overjoyed by the clamour that greeted him in the theatre he had built, trusting in former claims to greatness, he did nothing to establish wider power, and stood as the mere shadow of a mighty name. So some oak-tree towers in a rich grove, hung with a nation's ancient trophies, sacred gifts of the victors, and though its clinging roots have lost their strength, their weight alone holds it, spreading naked branches to the sky, casting shade not with leaves but its trunk alone, and though it quivers, doomed to fall at the next gale, among the host of sounder trees that rise around it, still it alone is celebrated. But Caesar possessed more than mere name and military fame: his energies were un-resting, his only shame in battle not to win; alert and unrestrained, every summons of anger or ambition his strength answered, he never shrank from an opportunistic use of the sword; intent on pursuing each success, grasping the gods' favour, pushing aside every obstacle to his supremacy, happy to clear a path through ruin. So a storm drives a lightning-bolt through the clouds, its flare shattering the daylight sky, with the sound of thunderous air, with a crash of the heavens, filling the human mind with terror, dazzling the eye with its slanting flame. Rushing to a given quarter of the skies, nothing material prevents its course; mighty in its descent and its retreat it spreads destruction far and wide, before gathering its scattered energies again.

### **Book I:158-182 The hidden causes of the war**

Such were the leaders' motives; but there were those hidden causes of the war, amongst the people, that will ever destroy powerful nations. For, the world conquered, and fortune showering excessive wealth on Rome, virtue yielded to riches, and those enemy spoils drew men to luxury. They set no bounds to wealth or buildings; greed disdained its former fare; men wore clothes scarcely decent on women; austerity, the mother of virtue, fled; and whatever ruined other nations was brought to Rome. Then estates were increased, until those fields once tilled by Camillus' iron ploughshare, or Curius' spade, became vast tracts tended by alien farmers. Such a people took no pleasure in peace and tranquility, no delight in liberty free from the sword. Thus they were quick to anger, and crime, prompted by need, was treated lightly; it was a virtue to take up arms and hold more power than the State, and might became the measure of right. Thence laws and statutes of the people passed by force, thence the consuls and tribunes alike confounding all justice; office snared by bribery, popular support bought at auction, while corruption, year after year perpetuating venal elections to the magistracy, destroyed the State; thence voracious usury, interest greedily seeking payment, trust readily broken, and multitudes profiting greatly from war.

### **Book I:183-227 Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon**

Now, Caesar, swiftly surmounting the frozen Alps,  
had set his mind on vast rebellion and future conflict.  
On reaching the banks of the Rubicon's narrow flow  
that general saw a vision of his motherland in distress,  
her sorrowful face showing clear in nocturnal darkness,  
with the white hair streaming from her turreted head,  
as with torn tresses and naked arms she stood before him  
her speech broken by sobbing: 'Where are you marching,  
whither do you bear those standards, my warriors?  
If you come as law-abiding citizens, here you must halt.'  
Then the general's limbs quaked, his hair stood on end,  
faintness overcame him and he halted, his feet rooted

to the river-bank. But soon he spoke: 'O, Jupiter, God of Thunder, who gazes from the Tarpeian Rock over the walls of the mighty city; O Trojan household gods of the tribe of Iulus, and you, sacred relics of Quirinus; O Jove of Latium, on Alba's heights, and you, fires of Vesta, and you, O Rome, equal in sanctity, favour my enterprise; I bring no assault on you in wild warfare; see me here, victorious by land and sea, always your champion – now as ever, if that be possible. His shall be the guilt, who forces me to act as your enemy.' Then Caesar let loose the bonds of war, and led his standards swiftly over the swollen stream; so a lion in the untilled wastes of burning Libya, seeing his foes nearby, crouches at first, uncertain, rousing himself to rage, but soon maddened, lashing his tail, his mane erect, sends out a roaring from his cavernous mouth, such that if a nimble Moor pierces his flesh with the lance he brandishes, or a spear lances at his vast chest, he leaps over the weapons careless of such wounds. The reddish waters of the Rubicon glide through the valleys and serve as the boundary between the land of Gaul and the farms of Italy. Born from a modest spring it is parched by the heat of summer, but then its volume was increased by winter, its waters swollen by the third rising of a rain-bearing moon with its moisture-laden horns, and by Alpine snows melted by damp gales. The cavalry first met the flow, taking position slantwise across the current, lessening its power so the rest of the army could ford it with ease. Once Caesar had crossed and reached the Italian shore on the further side, he halted on territory proscribed to them: 'Here I relinquish peace,' he cried, 'and the law already scorned, to follow you, my Fortune. Let me hear no more talk of pacts, I have placed my trust in those for far too long, now I must seek the judgement of war.'

### **Book I:228-265 Entry into Ariminum (Rimini)**

So he spoke, urging his men on through the shadows  
of night swifter than the missile whirled from a Balearic  
sling, or the arrow the Parthian looses behind him.  
As the stars fled the light and the morning star shone  
alone, he entered nearby Ariminum, bringing terror.  
So the day dawned that witnessed the first turmoil  
of the war; though, by the will of the gods, or a stormy  
southerly wind, clouds veiled the mournful light.  
Halting in the forum they had seized, the soldiers  
were ordered to lay down their arms while a blare  
of trumpets, shrill clarion calls and booming horns  
sounded the civil war's first alarm. Roused from sleep,  
leaping from their beds, men snatched at the weapons  
hung beside the household gods, arms of a long peace:  
disintegrating shields bared to their frames, javelins  
with bent points, swords scarred by the gnawing rust.  
But on seeing the glitter of Roman eagles, and Caesar  
on horseback with his army, they stood rooted by fear,  
their chilled limbs shaking with terror, unspoken  
complaint echoing in their minds: 'Alas for our town,  
so close to Gaul, doomed by its site to fatal misfortune!  
Everyone else knows deep peace, profound tranquility,  
but we grant the first spoils and bivouac to these madmen.  
Better if Fate had set us down under an Eastern sky,  
or in the frozen north guarding the tents of nomads  
and not the gateway to Italy. We were the first to feel  
the advance of the Senones, the swords of Hannibal,  
the Cimbrian invasion, the wild onrush of the Teutones:  
whenever Fate turns on Rome, its attackers take the road  
that passes through here.' Such was each man's silent  
moan, not daring to utter his fears aloud; none voiced  
his grief; so the fields are silent when winter strikes  
bird-life dumb, or the wide ocean, muted in calm weather.  
And now, as light dispersed the chill shades of night,  
Destiny lit the flames of war, setting the spur to Caesar's

wavering heart, shattering the barriers shame interposed and driving him on to conflict. Fate worked to justify his rebellion, and found a pretext for his use of arms.

### **Book I:266-351 The exiled tribunes: Caesar's speech**

For the Senators, exceeding their powers, had threatened the fractious tribunes and expelled them from the anxious city, recalling the like fate of the Gracchi; and so the exiles headed for Caesar's camp, now advanced close to Rome. With them was daring Curio of the venal tongue, once the voice of the people and a bold champion of freedom, bringing armed leaders down to the level of the crowd. Finding Caesar turning over alternative paths in his mind, he cried: 'I, when my voice could serve your interests, Caesar, when I was allowed to take the Rostrum, cementing waverers to your cause, I extended your command, defied the Senate. But now the strictures of war silence law; driven from our city, we suffer exile willingly; for your victory will render us citizens once more. While your enemies are in confusion, be swift; to those who are on the brink, delay is ever fatal. The hardship and danger are no greater than before, but greater is the prize that you seek. Ten years you fought the Gauls, yet how small a part of Earth Gaul represents! Win a few battles and Rome that subdued the world is yours. As things are, no long triumphal procession awaits you, the Capitol demands no laurels of yours be consecrated; rather gnawing envy denies you all, and your conquests of foreign lands will meet only with reprimand. Pompey, your son-in-law, resolves to topple you from power. You could rule not half the world, but the whole of it, alone.' Eager as Caesar was for war already, this speech increased his fury, and added to his fervour, as a racehorse at Olympia, already straining against the barrier, trying to loose the bolts with its forehead, is encouraged further by the shouting. There and then he summoned his legions to the standards; a look silenced the clamour and confusion of the troops,

a gesture commanded quiet, and he addressed them:  
'Friends, who have faced with me the perils of a thousand battles these ten years past, is this, in victory, your reward for the blood with which you drenched the northern fields, for winter, wounds and death beneath the Alps? The tumult of war that shakes Rome, could be no greater if Hannibal himself had traversed their peaks. Recruits swell the cohorts' ranks; the forests are felled to build ships; Caesar is ordered to be hounded by land and sea. If my standards were levelled in defeat, if the fierce tribes of Gaul were raging at my back, how would my enemies be acting then? Yet now, when Fate favours me, and summons me to power, they challenge me. Let Pompey, weakened by long peace, come and make war with his fresh levies and his toga-wearing partisans, eloquent Marcellus, and Cato that empty name. Shall Pompey be fed with despotic power perpetually renewed by his mean venal followers? Must Pompey hold the reins before lawful age? Shall Pompey cling forever to the honours he has stolen? Should I not complain when he grasped the whole world's harvest and commanded the hungry to obey him? Who does not know how the barracks invaded the fearful courts, how soldiers with grim blades gleaming surrounded stunned and anxious jurors? How warriors broke into the sanctuary of justice, Pompey's standards laying siege to Milo in the dock? Now once more, he plans illegal conflict, to escape the taint of an old age buried in obscurity. He's used to civil war, taught wickedness by Sulla and in line to outdo his teacher. Just as the fierce tiger, that has drunk deep of the blood of the cattle slain as he follows his mate from lair to lair in the Hyrcanian jungle, never again loses his fierceness, so Pompey, who once licked Sulla's sword, still thirsts. Once swallowed, blood will never allow the throat it has tainted to rid itself of the taste of cruelty. Where is the end to power so long continued? Where, the limits to his crimes? Let the wretch learn from Sulla's example and relinquish power. First the Cilician pirates, then the endless war with Mithridates, that an infamous poisoning failed to end, and now am I, Caesar,



to be Pompey's crowning task, for failing to surrender eagles of victory? If they rob me of my just reward for my labours, let my leaderless soldiers at least be paid for their long service; let them march in triumph, whoever their new general may be. What peaceful harbour shall they find when weakened by age? Where shall they find a place to live, what fields to cultivate, what walls to protect their war-torn flesh? Shall Pompey grant colonies to his pirates? Raise your standards, long victorious! Raise them high! Let us employ the power we have created. He must yield all to the strong, who denies them their due. Nor will heaven fail us. Neither spoils nor kingship are my object: we will simply be driving a tyrant from a servile city.'

### **Book I:352-391 Laelius' speech**

So he spoke; but the men, doubtful, muttered anxiously and uncertainly under their breath. Proud as they were, and unafraid of bloodshed, they were torn by love for their country and its gods, till recalled to fear of Caesar and a dire propensity for slaughter. For Laelius, ranked as chief centurion and bearing a well-earned decoration, those oak-leaves granted for saving a Roman's life, called out: ' Mightiest general of the Roman people, if I have leave to speak, and to speak the truth, we say you have endured too much and held back too long. Do you lack faith in us? While the hot blood moves and these bodies breathe, while our arms have strength enough to hurl a javelin, must you submit to the toga, to the Senate's tyranny? Is it so bad to fight a civil war? Lead us among the Scythian tribes, or the hostile shores of Syrtes, or the burning sands of parched Libya, we who to leave a conquered world behind us have tamed the swelling ocean waves and the foaming waters of Rhine: order me, I must follow with strength and will. He is no friend of mine, Caesar, against whom your trumpets sound. I swear by your standards of ten victorious campaigns, and by your triumphs, whatever

the foe, if you command me to bury my blade in my brother's breast, in my father's throat, in my wife's pregnant body, I will do all, though my arm waver. If you'd have me despoil the gods, fire their temples, the furnace that coins an army's pay shall melt their images; if you'd have me pitch camp by Tiber's waters, I'll dare to invade the fields of Italy, mark out the lines; whatever walls you'd level these arms will drive the ram, and break their stones apart, though the city you doom to utter destruction, be Rome herself.' All the cohorts shouted assent to this, raising their arms aloft together, pledging themselves to any war to which Caesar called them. Their cries rose to the heavens: as loud as when a Thracian northerly falls on the cliffs of pine-clad Ossa, and the forest roars earth-bent or rebounding to the sky.

#### **Book I:392-465 Caesar gathers his forces**

Caesar, finding civil war so eagerly welcomed by his men, and finding fortune favourable, granted destiny no delay due to idleness, but summoned all his forces scattered throughout Gaul, moving every legion towards Rome. From tents pitched in the mountains beside Lake Lemman, the soldiers came, from the fort on the heights of Vosegus above winding shores, that controlled the warlike Lingones with their painted weapons: others from the fords of the Isar, that river which flows so great a distance, till its waters merge with the more famous Danube, losing its name before it meets the waves of the sea. The fair-haired Ruthenians were freed from their station; the gentle Aude and the Var, at the boundary of an enlarged Italy, joyed to bear no Roman keels; free too that harbour of Monaco, sacred to Hercules, its hollow cliffs encroaching on the sea and over which neither Caurus nor Zephyrus has power; only Circius that stirs the shoreline, holds it alone, and bars the safe roadstead; and free that strip of Belgian coast, disputed, claimed by sea and land in turn, when the vast ocean inundates it or ebbs away;

some onshore wind from the horizon blows perhaps, drives  
the seas on then fails them, or perhaps Tethys' wild waters  
are attracted by the moon, stirred by the phases of that second  
of celestial bodies, or perhaps fire-bearing Titan, to drink  
the waves that nourish him raises the ocean billows skyward?  
I leave the cause to those who study the workings of the world,  
from me let whatever makes that endless motion, as the gods wish,  
be hidden. Gone, the soldiers who held the land of the Nemes,  
and the banks of the Adour, where the Tarbellians hem in the sea  
that beats gently against the winding shore. Their foe's departure  
delights the Santoni and Bituriges, the Suessones, nimble despite  
their long spears; the Leuci and Remi, experts in the javelin,  
the Sequani who delight in wheeling their bridled horses;  
the Belgae, skilled in driving war-chariots of others' devising,  
and the Arvernian tribe who falsely claim kinship with Rome  
through descent from Troy; the Nervii, prone to rebel endlessly  
against us, tainted by breach of treaty with slaughtered Cotta;  
the Vangiones, loose-trousered like the Sarmatians; the fierce  
Batavians whose courage is roused by a blare of curved bronze  
trumpets. There is joy where Cinca's waters flow, where Rhone  
takes the Saône in its swift course, and bears it onwards to the sea,  
where tribes live perched on the mountain heights among the snowy  
cliffs of the Cevennes. The Treviri rejoiced at the army's leaving,  
and the close-cropped Ligurians who once outdid their long-haired  
neighbours with flowing locks that adorned their necks, and those  
who, with pitiful victims, placate their harsh Teutatis, their Esus  
whose savage shrines make men shudder, their Taranis whose  
altar is no less cruel than that of Scythian Diana. The bards too  
who in their verses sing the praise of famous heroes killed  
in battle, poured out lays at their ease. The Druids laid down  
their weapons and returned to their barbaric rites and alien modes  
of worship. They alone are granted the true knowledge, or the false,  
of the gods and celestial powers; they live in the furthest groves  
of the deep forests; they teach that the soul does not descend  
to Erebus' silent land, to Dis' sunless kingdom, but the same spirit  
breathes in another body. If what they say is true, then our death  
is merely a moment in the course of continuing life. Thus the tribes

on whom the pole star gazes are sweetly deceived, since they are free of the terror of dying, our greatest fear, and the warrior there is eager to meet the steel, is brave in the face of death, convinced it is cowardice to be over-protective of a life that will be renewed. Even men posted to keep the long-haired Cayci from the Belgae abandoned the Rhine's savage shores, heading for Rome, and all the empire was left exposed to the advance of foreign nations.

### **Book I:466-525 Fear and apprehension in Rome**

Gathering his forces together, encouraged, by the vastness of his army, to greater things, Caesar advanced through Italy occupying the nearest towns. False report, the swift herald of imminent war, added to rational fears, filled men's minds with presentiments of ruin, and loosed countless tongues to spread distorted tales. News was of some fierce cavalry encounter on the wide plains that pasture Bevagna's bulls; that Caesar's foreign horsemen scoured the region where the Nar meets the Tiber; that the general, advancing with all his gathered eagles and standards led his columns in full march, halting in crowded bivouacs. Men's previous view of him differs from the present. They deem him now a monster, more savage than the enemy he has conquered. Men say the tribes between the Rhine and Elbe, uprooted from their northern home, are following on behind him; the order given that Rome be sacked by savage tribesmen before their very eyes. So, in fear, each lends strength to rumour, and dreads the nameless evils he invents. Nor were the people alone filled with baseless terrors, the House was stirred, Senators leapt from their seats and fled, leaving the Consuls the task of declaring a war they dreaded. Then, unsure of a safe haven or how to escape danger, they followed the crowd in headlong flight wherever their haste might lead, pouring onwards in long unbroken streams. You might have thought that impious flames had seized their houses, or that the city swayed to an earthquake's

shock, since the frenzied crowd ran wildly through the city, as if the one hope of escape from ruin was to flee their native walls. So a captain abandons ship, when a southerly gale drives the waves from Libyan Syrtes' shoals, and the heavy mast topples with all its canvas, he leaping with his crew into the waves, each man choosing shipwreck before the timbers of the hull are shattered. So with war they fled the abandoned city. No aged father could restrain his son, no weeping wife her husband, none stayed to mouth a prayer for escape from danger before their household gods, or lingered on the threshold, at the last, filled with the sight of their beloved city. The crowd's flight was irrevocable. O how easily the gods grant us supremacy, and how grudgingly maintain it! Rome with its citizens and subject peoples, a Rome that could well hold the whole human race collected, was left a ready prize to Caesar, by cowardly hands. The Roman soldier besieged by the enemy in a foreign land defies nocturnal danger behind a frail palisade; swiftly piling turf he sleeps secure in his tent defended by his mound, but let the name of war be heard and Rome is abandoned, her walls no shield even for a single night. Yet such depths of fear must be forgiven; Pompey himself in flight gave cause for fear. And hope for a future free of dread was lacking, since clear signs of greater ills to come were granted; the gods filled the earth, the sea, the sky, with their menacing portents.

### **Book I:526-583 Ghosts and portents**

In the dark of night, unknown constellations were seen, the sky ablaze with fire, light shooting across the void of space, forming the hairy tail of that baleful star, the comet, that signals a change of earthly power.

Lightning flared endlessly from a deceptively clear sky,  
and the flames flickering in the heavens took sundry  
shapes in the dense atmosphere, now a great javelin,  
now a torch with scattered rays. A silent lightning bolt  
gathering flame from the cloudless north, struck  
Latium's capital, Alba Longa, and the lesser lights  
that move through the sunless sky by night were seen  
at noon. The moon, at the full, her horns joined,  
her orb reflecting her brother Phoebus's light,  
suddenly plunged into earth's shadow, grew dim.  
The sun himself, in raising his face to the zenith,  
veiled his orb in shadow, hid his fiery chariot  
in dense darkness, driving humankind to despair  
of daylight; such was the darkness that swallowed  
Thyestes' city, Mycenae, when the sun turned back  
to where he had risen. Fierce Mulciber, in Sicily,  
opened Etna's jaws wide; the flames not rising  
skywards but leaning to engulf the Italian shore.  
Charybdis the black churned bloody waves from  
the ocean bed, and Scylla's savage dogs whined.  
The fire was violently doused on Vesta's altar;  
while the flames of the pyre signalling the end  
of the Latin Festival split apart and, twin-tipped,  
rose up like those of the royal Theban brothers.  
Earth ceased turning on its axis; the Alpine chain  
lost the ancient snow from its shivering summits;  
and the sea flooded Calpe and far Atlas in the west.  
They say the gods of the nations shed tears, while  
sweat on the Lares testified to the city's travails;  
in the temples the offerings fell from the walls,  
birds of ill-omen marred the day, and wild beasts  
boldly made their lairs at night in the heart of Rome.  
The jaws of brute creatures uttered human speech;  
women bore monstrous offspring with surplus limbs,  
the mothers appalled by this birth of strange infants;  
while dire prophecies of the Cumaean Sibyl passed  
from mouth to mouth. The faithful, inspired by fierce

Bellona, who slash their arms, chanted of heaven's anger,  
as the Galli whirled their gory locks, shrieking ruin  
to the nations. Groans issued from the urns filled  
with the ashes of the dead. The clash of weapons  
was heard, loud cries in the forest depths, sounds  
of ghostly armies locked in battle. Those who tilled  
the fields near the outer walls fled on every side,  
as the vast shape of a Fury stalked round the city,  
tossing her hissing snaky locks, and brandishing  
a burning pine-tree with its tip held downwards.  
Such was the one who drove Agave to madness  
at Thebes, or brandished fierce Lycurgus' goads.  
Such was Megaera, who as agent of Juno's cruelty  
terrified Hercules, though he'd seen the realm of Dis.  
Trumpets blared, and as armies cry out as they clash,  
so the dark of night rang out though the wind was still.  
Now Sulla's ghost was seen to rise from the midst  
of the Campus Martius, prophesying doom, while  
Marius, burst from his sepulchre, lifting his head  
beside chill Anio's stream, scattered the folk in flight.

### **Book I:584-637 Arruns reads the future**

So they chose to follow ancient custom and summon  
Etruscan seers. The most venerable was Arruns, who  
lived in the deserted city of Luca, for whom the track  
of the lightning bolt, the signs on the warm entrails,  
and the significance of every bird wandering the sky  
held no secrets. First he decreed that those monstrous  
infants be destroyed, whom Nature at odds with herself  
engendered from no true seed, ordering the vile  
fruit of profitless wombs burned with inauspicious fuel.  
Then, at his orders, the fearful citizens circled the city  
while the pontiffs empowered to perform the task  
cleansed the walls with solemn lustration, marching  
around the sacred *pomerium*, the boundary of the city.  
Behind them walked the lesser priests, girded in Gabine

fashion; the Vestal Virgins led by the priestess, her brow bound with sacred ribbons, she alone allowed to set eyes on Trojan Minerva; and next the Fifteen who guard the divine prophecies and mystic chants, who summon Cybele from her bath in Almo's brook; then the Augurs, who read the meaning of bird-flight on the left; the Seven who hold the festal banquets; the Titian Guild; the Salii who bear the sacred shields on their shoulders in triumph; and the Flamen whose pointed cap rises tall from his noble head. While this long procession wound round the vast city, Arruns gathered the scattered embers of the lightning-bolts and buried them in the earth to a gloomy muttering. He sanctified the place, and brought a sacrificial bull to a holy altar, a bull chosen for its size, but when he began to pour the wine, and sprinkle the grain from his slanting knife, the victim struggled violently against the unwelcome sacrifice; yet when the noble attendants dragged on its horns it sank to earth, helplessly offering its unprotected neck to the blow. The liquid that flowed from the gaping wound was not red blood but a strange and terrible slime. Appalled by the dark outcome, Arruns grew pale, and snatched up the entrails to read the cause of divine anger. Their very colour alarmed him, the organs, black with congealed gore, were marked with signs of malignant sickness, covered everywhere with dull patches, and spots of blood. The liver, he saw, was flabby and rotten, with ominous streaks on its exposed part. The branches of the panting lungs were indistinct, with only a thin membrane separating the vital organs. The heart was flattened, the flesh exuded corrupted blood through gaping cracks, and the bowels betrayed their hiding place. Behold, he saw a horror never once witnessed in a victim's entrails without disaster following; a vast second lobe grew on the lobe of the liver,



so that one part hung flabby with sickness,  
while the other quivered and its veins trembled  
to an a-rhythmic beat. Perceiving the prediction  
of profound disaster, he cried aloud: 'I scarcely  
dare to reveal to man the evil the gods prepare.  
My sacrifice finds favour, not with mighty Jove  
but with the infernal gods who enter the body  
of this dead bull. We feared the worst, but what  
follows will be worse than our fears. May the gods  
re-cast what we saw, the entrails prove false,  
and the arts of our founder Tages mere invention!'  
So the Etruscan seer spoke of the tortuous future,  
veiling and hiding it in profound ambiguity.

### **Book I:638-672 Figulus reads the heavens**

And Figulus, whose aim it was to know the gods  
and the secrets of the heavens, he whom not even  
Egyptian Memphis equalled in stellar observation  
or calculation of the stars' passage, he also spoke:  
'If the universe changes endlessly ungoverned  
by laws, then the heavenly bodies wander on  
errant courses, but if it be guided by fate a swift  
destruction will overtake Rome and all mankind.  
Shall the ground open and cities be swallowed,  
and fierce heat overtake our temperate clime?  
Shall the unfaithful soil refuse its produce,  
the waters everywhere running with poison?  
What kind of ruin, O gods, does your anger  
prepare, and by what means? The lives of many  
are doomed to end on the same day. Were Saturn,  
the cold and baleful planet displaying his dark  
rays in the zenith, then Aquarius would pour  
down upon us such floods as Deucalion saw,  
and Earth would vanish under a waste of waters.  
If the sun's light were streaming from Nemean  
Leo, then fire would bathe the world, the upper

air burning would be consumed by the solar chariot.  
Their rays are quiet now, but Mars, what dire  
purpose have you in rousing the threatening  
Scorpion with fiery tail, scorching its pincers?  
For benign Jupiter is hidden deep in the west,  
Venus' healthful planet is dimmed, Mercury's  
swift path is retrograde, Mars keeps the heavens  
alone. Why have the constellations deserted  
their known paths, moving obscurely through  
the sky, yet Orion's sword-girt flank shines  
all too bright? War's madness is upon us,  
where the sword's power will wildly confound  
all law, and vicious crime be called virtue.  
This frenzy will last many years, and what use  
our praying to the gods above that it might end?  
With peace will come dictatorship. Let Rome  
drag out an unbroken succession of sufferings  
and prolong her agony for years, free only  
henceforth while such civil strife endures.

### **Book I:673-695 Apollo inspires a prophecy**

These dire forebodings were enough to terrify  
the fearful people, but worse was to follow.  
For a woman ran through the stunned city,  
as a Bacchante inspired by Theban Lyaeus  
will rush down from the summit of Pindus,  
revealing by her cries the force of Phoebus  
in her chest: 'Where are you carrying me,  
O Paeon, so swiftly through the heavens,  
where will you set my feet? I see Pangaeus  
bright with snowy ridges, and Philippi,  
beneath Haemus' crags. Say, O Phoebus,  
what madness embroils Roman arms  
and spears in battle, in war without a foe?  
Where now am I driven? To the east you  
carry me, where Nile's Egyptian waters

stain the sea: I recognise that headless  
corpse stranded on the sandy shore.  
Grim Enyo has transferred Pharsalia's  
ranks over the waves to treacherous Syrtis  
and parched Libya: there you transport me;  
then away over the cloudy Alps and high  
Pyrenees, back to my native city where  
civil war reaches the very Senate House.  
Faction again rears its head, and once more  
I circle Earth. Grant me to see a different  
land, O Phoebus, for Philippi I have seen.'  
So saying she fell, abandoned, her frenzy spent.

### **End of Book I**

## **Book II:1-66 Rome in turmoil**

Now the gods' anger was revealed, the world showed every token of war, and prescient Nature overturned consensus and the rule of law, with monster-bearing tumult breeding wickedness. Why, lord of Olympus, did you see fit to load this ill on suffering mortals, of learning disaster's approach through dire portents? Whether some creator first formed the shapeless region of pure matter, establishing the eternal chain of causes, binding himself as well by universal laws, and within inflexible limits apportioning the universe to endure the prescribed ages; or whether nothing is pre-ordained, Fate driving the turns and returns of alternating change, and Chance being ruler of mankind, let your purposes, whatever they may be, be sudden; let men's minds be blind to future doom; let them fear yet live in hope. For, when men learned from the heavens' truth-bearing portents of the vast calamity set to overtake the world, all business ceased and gloom descended on Rome. The magistrates concealed themselves in normal dress, and no purple accompanied the lictors' rods. Mourning was silent though, for a profound voiceless grief seized all people. Thus at the hour of passing, before the corpse is laid out, the whole household is stunned and speechless, and before the mother with loosened hair summons her attendants to beat their breasts with harsh hands she yet clasps the limbs, stiffening with life's departure, gazes on the inanimate features, on eyes fixed in death. Apprehension she feels no longer, and as yet no grief, but robbed of thought she hangs there, stunned by loss. Now the women doffed their normal garb and filled the temples with their sad gatherings. Some drenched the sacred statues with their tears, others threw themselves on the stone floors, tearing, shedding locks of their hair at the holy thresholds, assailing ears accustomed to prayer with their frenzied shrieks. Nor did they simply bow before

the Mighty Thunderer in his temple: dividing their worship between the deities, no altar was free of their cries of pain. One, whose cheeks were lacerated, wet with tears, shoulders blackened and bruised by blows, called out: 'Now, women, now is the hour to beat your breasts and tear your hair. Hold back not a single ounce of grief to meet the crowning sorrow, for now we are free to weep, when the fate of these generals is unsure; while should either win we will be forced to smile.' So grief goads and lacerates itself. The soldiers too, departing, setting out to meet the enemy forces, poured out justifiable complaints against the gods' cruelty: 'Ours is a wretched fate, not born in the age of the Punic wars, not born to be those who fought at the Trebia or Cannae. We do not ask for peace, you gods! Only, stir foreign nations, rouse savage countries; let the whole world gather itself for war, let the Medes sweep down on us from Persian Susa, let the Danube fail to stem the Massagetae, let the Elbe, the Rhine's unconquered mouth loose swarms of blonde-haired Suebians from the furthest north: render us the enemy of every nation; but avert this civil war! Let the Dacians press on us from one side, the Getae the other; let Caesar confront the Spaniards, let Pompey raise his standards against the Persian archers, let every Roman grasp a sword, or if it is heaven's purpose to destroy the Roman people, let the vast firmament gather its fires and fall as lightning on the earth below. Cruel Father, while they are yet unstained, strike both ranks, both generals with the selfsame lightning bolt. Shall they be allowed to wreak such monstrous havoc, choosing who rules the City? Civil war is almost a price worth paying that neither should.' Such were the complaints uttered by doomed patriotism. The old were tormented too by anxieties of their own, cursing their fate in bearing the grievous weight of years, lamenting they had lived on to endure a second civil war.

## **Book II:67-138 History recalled - Marius**

One of them spoke, seeking precedent for his deep fears:  
‘Such were the troubles Fate prepared for us when Marius,  
triumphant conqueror of the Teutones and Africa’s Jugurtha,  
was driven out, and hid himself in Minturnae’s miry swamp.  
Greedy quicksand and spongy marshes hid the secret  
Fate had placed there; yet later that aged general’s flesh  
was scarred by iron fetters reduced by long vile imprisonment.  
He was to die though as Fortune’s friend, as consul in a Rome  
he had ruined, though at first he had suffered for his crimes.  
Death itself often fled the man; when the power to take his life  
was granted to some foe who hated him, it failed: the enemy  
was paralysed and the sword slipped from the weakened hand.  
A great light had shone in the darkness of his prison, dread  
deities that wait on wickedness were seen; a Marius yet to be;  
and a fearful voice was heard: ‘You must not touch that neck.  
Before he dies, by the destiny that governs ages, Marius shall  
bring death to many; quench your futile anger.’ If the Cimbrian  
lictor sought to avenge his slaughtered race it was right then  
to let that old man live, for no divine favour but the vast wrath  
of heaven protected the life of that vicious man, appointing him  
its ready instrument for Rome’s destruction. Then he was borne  
over adverse seas to the hostile shore of Africa, pursued through  
deserted villages, penned in the ravaged realm of that Jugurtha  
who had graced his triumph, the ashes of Carthage his bed.  
Marius and Carthage alike found solace in their mutual destiny;  
that both were equally brought low reconciled them to the gods.  
There Marius nursed a hatred like Hannibal’s. As soon as fate  
smiled on him again, he freed bands of slaves, the prisoners  
loosed their fetters and flexed instead their arms for slaughter.  
None were allowed to bear his standards but those already  
inured to crime, who brought their guilt with them to the ranks.  
Oh Fate! What a day that was, the day that Marius as victor  
seized Rome, with what vast strides Death stalked the streets!  
Nobles and commoners both perished, the sword roamed far  
and wide, no breast was spared the steel. Blood pooled in

the temples, endless death drenched the red slippery stones. Age was no protection: it did not scorn to anticipate the last declining years or cut short a wretched child at life's dawn. For what crime could a tender infant deserve to die? Yet it was deemed enough that it had a life to lose. Violence, its own spur, saw laggards in those who sought for guilt. Many perished to complete the numbers, the bloodstained victors snatched up heads sliced from an unknown neck, ashamed of their empty hands. Hope of life lay only with those who pressed trembling lips to Marius' accursed hand. O degenerate nation! Though a thousand swords followed that new emblem of death, centuries of life were hardly worth such a price, far less a brief and shameful respite till Sulla returned! Who has space to grieve for so many? There is scarce time to tell of Baebius torn limb from limb, rent by the countless hands of the mob, scattered piecemeal; or how the head of Antonius, prophet of disaster, was swung by its white hair, torn and dripping blood, placed by a soldier on the festive table. Gaius Fimbria, then, mutilated the bodies of the Crassi, both father and son; while the tribunes' blood drenched cruel stakes. And Quintus Scaevola the Pontifex found no protection with outraged Vesta: they murdered him in her very shrine before the ever-burning flame of the goddess, though the thin stream of blood that ran from his scrawny throat failed to quench the fire. Marius resumed the rods of office in a seventh consulship before his life ended. He had suffered every blow worse fortune can inflict, and enjoyed every gift of the better, experiencing the full extremes of human destiny. Then how many fell at Sacriportus where Sulla triumphed! And what mounds of corpses filled the Colline Gate that day when rule and the capital almost moved elsewhere, Samnites thinking to deal Rome a heavier blow than the Caudine Forks!'

## **Book II:139-233 History recalled - Sulla**

‘Then came Sulla’s vengeance to crown the endless slaughter. He shed what little of Roman blood remained, and while he lopped corrupted limbs, his too savage surgery passed all bounds, his blade following too far where disease had led. The guilty were executed, but in an hour where only guilty men remained. Licence was given then to personal hatred; resentment, free of the curb of law, rushed to vengeance. The deeds were done not for a single reason, but each man wrought evil for himself. Sulla by a single order sanctioned all. The servant drove the accursed blade through his master’s body; sons were drenched in their fathers’ blood and fought for the privilege of beheading them; brother killed brother for a price. The tombs were full of fugitives, the bodies of the living juxtaposed with corpses, while men packed the wild beasts’ lairs. Here one tied a noose about his throat and broke his neck; there another hurled himself headlong and was dashed to death on the harsh ground; in such ways they robbed the bloodstained victor of their own destruction. Here a man piled wood for his own pyre and then, before his veins had emptied, leapt into the flames to immolate himself while he could. The heads of the leading citizens were carried on pikes through the stunned city and piled in the midst of the forum; wherever they died the victims were heaped. Thrace never knew so many slaughtered in Bistonian Diomedes’ stables, nor did Greece ever mourn so many mutilated corpses in Oenomaus’ Pisan courtyard. When the bodies, dissolving in putrefaction, features effaced by the lapse of time, had lost all identifying marks, wretched parents gathered the remains they alone knew, and stealthily removed them. I myself remember how I searched the corpses murdered in Sulla’s ‘peace’, trying to recognise the shapeless features of my murdered brother, to rescue him for the fire. Round all the decapitated dead I went, seeking a neck to fit that severed head. Why speak of the bloody atonement offered the ghost of Catulus? It was a Marius, Gratidianus, who paid



the price, perhaps unacceptable to the dead, a dreadful sacrifice to the insatiable tomb. We saw every aspect of him mutilated yet no single stroke granted death; such was the evil form of cruel savagery, not even allowing a dying man to die. His arms were wrenched from the shoulders, his tongue, severed, quivered and beat the empty air with mute motion; one man pared the ears, another the nostrils of the curved nose; a third man dragged the eyeballs from their sockets, and when the eyes had witnessed the limbs' fate, cut them both free. Who can credit such atrocities, or that a single body could command such torment? Men's limbs look so when they are broken and crushed beneath the weight of fallen ruins. The drowned who perished mid-ocean, and drifted ashore are no more disfigured. What made the murderers waste their advantage, by obliterating Marius' features, as if they were of no worth? They should have left them recognisable, so his death could be proven, and meet with Sulla's favour. The Fortuna of Praeneste saw all its citizens put to the sword as one, the population dead in the time it takes one man to die. And the only Roman soldiers who remained, the flower of Italy, were slaughtered to drench Rome's 'Sheepfold' with their blood. Famine, or storms at sea, the sudden fall of buildings, plagues from the earth and air, war's turmoil may have caused the violent deaths of so many healthy men, at one fell swoop, many times before, but never such murderous executions. So dense were the ranks of men, faces pale, with death upon them, the victors could barely wield their weapons; and the slaughter done, the victims could not even fall, but swayed together with bowed heads; the survivors were weighed down by the heaps of corpses, the dead took a share in dealing death, the living crushed by the burden of the slain. Sulla, unmoved, sat at ease, viewing dreadful deeds from on high; unabashed at his passing sentence on so many thousands of wretched folk. The bodies of his victims heaped together were hurled into the Tiber, the first falling into deep water, the rest on the sunken dead, until boats sailing downstream

stuck fast, the water dammed by a barrier of corpses,  
the river sinking into its bed as far as the distant sea.  
Yet the torrents of blood forced a way, drenching  
the plain, carving a swift-running channel to the Tiber,  
swelling the constricted lake till its bed and shoreline  
could no longer hold back the flow, that drove all  
the corpses aground, and violently thrust its way  
to the Tyrrhene Sea, the bloody torrent sundering  
the blue depths. Were these deeds such that Sulla  
was worthy to be called his country's saviour, titled  
Felix, 'the fortunate', earning a tomb in the Campus?  
Now we must suffer the same woes again, must pass  
through that same field of carnage, such is the end  
appointed for every civil war. Yet our fears now  
presage worse and deeper damage to humankind  
will come of this passage of arms. The great prize  
Marius and his exiles fought for was Rome itself,  
victory brought Sulla no more than the extinction  
of the factions he hated; but these rivals of today  
have long held power, and are called by destiny  
to another goal. If either were content with what  
sated Sulla he would not stir civil conflict.' Such  
the elders' cry, recalling the past, dreading the future.

### **Book II:234-285 Marcus Junius Brutus the Younger**

But noble Brutus' heart knew no dread, and amidst  
the deep terrors of fearsome change he was no part  
of that grieving populace. In the depths of night,  
when Arcadian Helice slanted her Wain downwards,  
he knocked at the humble door of his kinsman Cato,  
and found him pondering, in sleepless anxiety,  
the fate of those around him, and Rome's plight,  
fearing for others, careless of himself. Brutus spoke  
thus: 'Virtue, driven from every place, banished  
long ago, finds her last remaining prop in you,  
no turn of fate exiling her from your heart, so you

must guide my uncertain will, support my weakness with your enduring strength. Let others follow Pompey or Caesar's standard, Brutus will have no leader but Cato. Are you a champion of peace, following your path, unchanged, amidst a shaken world, or have you chosen to join with those leaders in crime, share in the evils of a maddened nation, and so absolve the war-makers of guilt? All others are driven to sinful arms by personal motives, some by hidden guilt, fearful of justice if peace returns; some by the need to stave off hunger with the sword and end their indigence with a world destroyed. None are spurred on to fight by mere impulse: pure bribery causes them to join the ranks: are you to be alone in choosing conflict for its own sake? What good was your standing firm so many years, untouched by the vices of a corrupt age, if your sole reward for the virtues of a lifetime is that the guilt which war reveals in others is to be yours too at the last? O, the gods forbid that this deadly conflict should stir your arms too to conflict. No javelin launched by you can hurtle blindly amid the cloud of missiles: rather that virtue may not sacrifice itself in vain, all the focus of battle will concentrate itself on you; for who though, staggering beneath some other stroke, would not wish to die by your blade, prove you guilty? A life of peace and tranquil solitude are fitter for you than war, thus the stars above hold their eternal course unshaken. The lower atmosphere is riven by lightning, the hollows of earth are rent by gales and forked flame, yet Olympus rears its head above the clouds. Such is celestial law that lesser things are troubled and stirred, while the greater know peace. What more joyous news for Caesar than to learn such a citizen has joined the fight! He will not resent your preference for his rival, for Pompey's ranks above his own, since if Cato endorses civil war he more than endorses Caesar himself. If

half the Senate, the consuls, and the rest choose to wage war for a leader who holds not a single office, there is enticement enough, but if Cato too follows Pompey, Caesar will seem the last free man on earth. Yet if they had chosen to bear arms for the sake of our country's laws, in defence of freedom; Brutus, the enemy of neither Pompey nor Caesar then, would still be the victor's foe when war is done.' So, Brutus. Cato from his heart's holy shrine replied:

**Book II:286-325 Marcus Porcius Cato the Younger**

'Brutus, I grant that civil war is evil, but wherever fate leads, virtue must follow without fear. That even I am rendered guilty will stand as a reproach to the gods. Who could choose to gaze on the fall of the stars above himself alone free from terror? Who could sit with folded hands when high heaven shattered and the earth shook with the massive chaos of the collapsing firmament? When distant nations, kings who reign beneath other stars beyond the seas, partake of Italy's madness and that of the Roman standards, shall I alone be idle? Far be it from me, you gods, that the fall of Rome, whose ruin will move Dahae and Getae should leave me indifferent! When death robs a father of his children, sorrow itself demands that he leads the long procession to their grave: he will thrust his arms into the funeral flames, holding the smoking torch to their lofty pyre. So I too shall never be torn from your lifeless body, Rome. Freedom, I shall follow to the grave your very name, your insubstantial shadow. Let it be so: let Rome atone to the pitiless gods utterly, let no man's life evade the claims of war! O that I might be condemned by all the powers of heaven and hell to act as scapegoat for all! As the enemy hordes fell upon Publius Decius

when he sacrificed his life, so may the Rhine's  
barbarians hurl their spears at me; may every  
weapon pierce me, may I, intercepting each,  
receive, myself, every blow dealt in this war!  
Let my blood redeem the nations, let my death  
pay the penalty that Rome's corruption merits.  
Why should those die who would willingly bear  
the yoke, and fail to resent the harshest tyranny?  
Point your swords towards me alone, who fight  
in vain for the law and justice others despise.  
My death alone would bring peace to Italy's  
peoples, and end their sufferings; aspiring  
tyranny need wage no war when I am gone.  
Shall I then follow the nation's standard  
with Pompey as my leader, though I know  
sadly that if fortune favours him he too covets  
dominion over the world? Well then, let me  
aid his victory, lest he thinks his triumph  
is for himself alone.' So Cato, with forceful  
reasoning urging on the younger man, stirring  
his ardent spirit to intense desire for civil war.

## **Book II:326-349 Marcia**

Meanwhile, as the sun dispelled the chill of night,  
the door sounded to a loud knocking, and in burst  
Marcia, Cato's former wife, in mourning for her  
husband Hortensius, arriving now from his pyre.  
As a girl she had wed this nobler husband, Cato,  
but being granted the reward and price of marriage  
in a third child, she was given to another house,  
to fill it with fruitfulness, and ally two families  
through her maternal blood. Now, having granted  
Hortensius' ashes their last resting place, she  
had hurried there in pitiful state, her hair unkempt  
and ragged, her breasts bruised by endless blows,  
covered with ash from the pyre. In that state alone

she found Cato's favour. And spoke to him sadly:  
'I have obeyed your command, Cato, while hot  
blood flowed in my veins and I was fertile:  
Twice wed, I have borne my husbands' children.  
I return to you, weary, worn from child-bearing,  
unwilling now to be given to some other man.  
Let me renew the faithful vows of our marriage;  
grant me the name of wife; let them write above  
my tomb: Cato's Marcia; let them not think  
in after days that you drove me out, handing  
me to a second husband. I am not here to share  
in happiness, or prosperous times, I am come  
to bear my part of anxiety and trouble. Let me  
follow the army. Why should I remain behind  
in peace and safety, more distant from civil  
conflict than Cornelia is, Pompey's wife?'

### **Book II:350-391 Cato's morality**

These words moved her husband, and though this day  
when fate called men to battle ill-suited marriage  
they resolved to tie the knot and perform the rites  
simply and without vain display, the gods alone  
bearing witness to the ceremony. No wreaths,  
no festive garlands hung from the lintel; no white  
ribbon ran here and there about the doorposts.  
The usual torches; the high couch above ivory  
steps with its gold embroidered coverlet; the wife's  
towered crown; her care not to touch the threshold  
with her feet as she crossed it – all this was absent.  
No saffron veil, to screen the bride's shy blushes  
hid her downcast face; no jewelled belt bound  
the flowing gown, no fair collar clasped her neck,  
no scarf clung to the shoulders, or clothed bare  
arms with its narrow veil. Marcia kept to her solemn  
mourning dress, and embraced her husband as she  
would her sons. The tunic's purple band was hid

by wool of funereal hue. The customary happy jests were absent too, nor was the stern husband greeted with ritual abuse in the Sabine manner. No kinsmen, no family members gathered, rather they were wed in silence, Brutus playing the role of augur. Cato refused to shave his reverend features, nor did his severe manner allow joy. (Since he had seen ill-omened weapons of war raised, he had let the grey hair cover his stern brow, and a mourner's growth of beard darken his face, as he alone, devoid of love or hate, had freedom to mourn for mankind. Nor did he seek to renew their marital relations, his iron nature was proof even against the marriage bed. Such was Cato's character, the austerity of his rigid morality – to maintain control and observe the limits set, to follow his nature, devote his life to his country, believing himself born to serve all men not himself. It was a feast to him to conquer hunger; a mere roof to ward off harsh weather a noble palace; the simple toga, a Roman's gown in times of peace, fine dress. Love's sole aim in his mind to engender children, he was a husband and a father to serve the State; worshipping justice, practising harsh virtues, to communal ends; and there was not one action of his life in which selfish pleasure claimed a share.

### **Book II:392-438 Pompey bases himself at Capua**

Pompey, meanwhile, had marched swiftly to occupy Capua's Campanian walls, founded by Trojan Capys. Choosing it as his military base, he resolved to launch his main campaign from there, dispersing and deploying his forces so as to encounter the foe where the wooded slopes of the Apennines lift above central Italy, no hills rising higher and towering more loftily into the heavens. Those mountains lie midway between the Tyrrhenian

and the Adriatic, bounded on the west where the waves break on Pisa's shore, on the east by Ancona that faces the Dalmatian billows. Deep mountain springs give rise to mighty rivers, their streams occupying the watersheds that face the two seas. The swift Metauro and the rapid Conca flow eastward, the Savio joined by the Isaurus, the Cesano, the Ofanto that meets the Adriatic waves, and there the Po, as great a river as the land affords, levelling forests, sweeps them to the sea, draining the soil of Italy. As legend has it, that was the first river whose banks were shaded by a fringe of poplars: when Phaethon drove the sun's car flat across its given course and with fiery reins set the skies aflame until the waters vanished and earth was scorched deep within, that river alone had current strong enough to counter the sun's fire. It would be no less wide than the Nile, did Nile not flood the Libyan sands beyond the levels of low-lying Egypt; and no less mightier than the Danube, if the Danube did not in its course gather the waters that might have flowed to other shores, leading them to the Euxine sea. Westward the waters leaving the Apennine's slopes give birth to the Tiber, and the Roya in its deep channel. From there too the swift Volturno flows, and the Sarno that breathes nocturnal exhalations, and the Liri driven by Vestinian waters through the wood-nymph Marica's domain, the Sele that grazes Salerno's rugged country, and the Magra, whose shallow stream's un-navigable, speeding towards the sea at Luni nearby. The Apennines close to the foothills of the Alps narrow and lift skywards facing towards Gaul, in a tall ridge, while further south the slopes yield harvests for the Marsians and Umbrians, and are tamed by the Samnite plough, their piny cliffs embracing the native tribes of Italy, not abandoning Italy till Scylla's waters bar the way, and reaching as far as Juno Lacina's Sicilian temple, for the unbroken ridge was longer than Italy is now until the mass of water broke through the isthmus and split the land, that end



of the Apennines crushed and severed by the two seas being yielded to Pelorus, the Punto del Faro of Sicily.

### **Book II:439-461 Caesar advances**

Caesar, eager for war, rejoiced that his only path onward meant shedding blood; delighted that Italy on which he trampled was not lacking in enemies, the fields he attacked were undefended, and even his marches not idle, since every battle brought on the following battle. He preferred to assault a city than have it open to admit him; to ravage the land, with fire and sword, than seize it without a fight. He scorned to move on uncontested roads, or seem a peaceful traveller. At that time, the Italian citizens, uncertain, hesitating in their support for one side or the other, and ready to surrender at the first alarm, still strengthened their defensive ramparts, crowning them on every side with steep palisades; arming tall towers along the walls with stones and slingshot. Though loyalty contended with the threat of danger, they still favoured Pompey, as when a southerly rules the waves, and all the sea is stirred by its vast power, so that even if Aeolus' trident opens the solid earth, and lets an easterly loose on the mounting breakers, the ocean, though struck by that second force, stays true to the first, and though the sky surrenders itself to the rain-filled easterly, the sea asserts the southerly's power. Yet threat of danger soon alters men's minds, and events were quick to banish fragile allegiances.

### **Book II:462-525 Defeat of Pompey's generals**

The Etrurians were left naked by Libo's hasty flight, and Thermus' rout robbed Umbria of its free action. Sulla too, lacking his father's good luck in civil war, turned back at the mere sound of Caesar's name.

When the cavalry advance reached the gates of Osimo, Varus left by the opposite gate, the enemy now unguarded, and fled to the forested hills. Lentulus also was driven from Asculum, and the victor following hard cut off the army, so only the general and the standards escaped, bringing no troops with them. Scipio too abandoned Nuceria's stronghold, leaving the citizens defenceless, though that was the station for fine soldiers recalled from Caesar's army due to the strength of Parthia; these were lives Pompey leant his kinsman to make good the losses in Gaul until he needed them again. Yet fierce Domitius ensconced behind strong walls in the city of Corfinio, had under his command those men recruited to suppress bloodstained Milo. Now, on seeing a distant cloud of dust rising from the plain, and the sunlight glittering on ranks of enemy weapons, he called out: 'Friends, run to the river and destroy the bridge. Let the stream spring fiercely from its mountain source, bring down its weight of waters and carry away the shattered planks in its foaming current. Let the war halt here, let the enemy spend himself in vain on these banks, check their general's headlong pace: it would be a victory for us to force Caesar to make a stand.' Without further speech he hurried his men from the walls, but all in vain. Caesar, seeing them run towards the bridge to bar his passage, moved first, crying out in pure anger: 'Not content with hiding your fear behind walls, you try to barricade yourselves from the plain, and thwart me with a river! Not if Ganges' swollen flood blocked his way, would Caesar be stopped by any stream, now the Rubicon is crossed. Send the cavalry forward, and let the infantry advance, take the bridge before it falls.' At this command, the light horse charged at the gallop over the plain, and strong arms hurled a heavy rain of javelins towards the bank. Driving off the guard, Caesar

occupied the undefended bridge, and the enemy were forced back to the safety of their citadel. Then Caesar built towers from which to launch huge missiles of stone, while a sloped roof crept towards the walls dividing the armies. Behold, an abomination in war, the gates were opened, the soldiers brought out their general, a prisoner! Domitius halted before his proud peer, and then, with still menacing look and unbowed head, that noble spirit demanded death by the sword. Caesar, knowing he feared pardon, and sought punishment, Said: 'Live on and, against your will, know the light because of my clemency. Be a token of hope to your friends, when they too are defeated, an example of my generosity. Even if you choose to take up arms again, even if you conquer, I will never use such favours to bargain for my life.' With that, Caesar ordered his bonds to be removed, yet how easily fate might have spared a Roman's blushes, by ensuring Domitius was slain outright! This was the greatest of insults, that a patriot be pardoned for joining an army led by Pompey and the Senate simply to fight for his country! Domitius, unperturbed, hid his deep anger, saying to himself: 'Thus disgraced shall I seek peace and quiet in Rome? Rather I'll hasten to the heart of the fiercest conflict and seek death at the first onset, fly straight to the mark, break every tie, and so escape his generosity!'

## **Book II:526-595 Pompey's speech to the army**

Meanwhile Pompey, unaware of his generals' defeat, prepared to move, so as to hearten his forces by a show of strength. Ready to sound the advance next day, he chose now to gage the ardour of his men before marching out.

His august voice addressed the silent ranks:  
'Avengers of wrong, followers of the true  
standard, O Romans, whose Senate arms you  
to defend our country, show your readiness  
for battle now! The fields of Italy burn with  
wild devastation, Gallic fury flows down from  
the wintry Alps, already blood stains, pollutes  
Caesar's swords. Better, you gods, that we  
have borne the first losses, that our enemies  
begin this evil, yet now Rome, led by myself,  
must seek justice and punishment. The battles  
you must fight are not mere battles, they express  
our nation's anger and vengeance. This is no  
more war than when Catiline prepared to burn  
our homes, or Lentulus his partner in crime,  
or the eager, bare-armed Cethegus. What  
pitiful madness of Caesar's! Though Fortune  
was ready to raise him to the ranks of Camillus  
or the mighty Metellus, he joins the likes of  
Marius and Cinna. His overthrow is ordained,  
as Catulus defeated Lepidus, as Carbo was  
beheaded at my orders, and lies now in his  
Sicilian grave, as Sertorius the exile fell,  
who stirred the fierce Spaniards to rebellion.  
yet, on my honour, I am loath to rank Caesar  
with them, I grieve that Rome lifts my arm  
against his madness. Would that a victorious  
Crassus had returned alive from the Parthian  
war on Scythia's border, that he might have  
conquered Caesar as he conquered Spartacus,  
no less guilty. But if the gods have ordained  
that Caesar too should be added to my titles,  
well then, this right hand can hurl the spear,  
the blood about my heart flows hot once more,  
and he shall learn that men patient in peace  
are no cowards in time of war. He may call me  
worn out and feeble, but be not disquieted by

my age; it matters not that I am older than he,  
so long as his soldiers are far older than mine!  
I have risen as high as a free people can exalt  
a citizen, and over me nothing but tyranny can  
reign. Whoever schemes to rise above Pompey  
in the city of Rome, exceeds a subject's wishes.  
Both consuls stand by me, and an army where  
every man is fit to command. Shall Caesar  
overthrow the Senate? No, Fortune does not  
act so blindly; she is not so shameless as that.  
Have ten years fighting Gallic rebels, an age  
granted to the task in vain, provoked him?  
Or perhaps his flight from the Rhine's chill  
waters, calling a tidal sea Ocean, and turning  
his back in terror on the Britons he attacked?  
Or have his idle threats increased now that  
reports of his insanity have driven the people  
of his native city to arms. Alas, you madman!  
All are not fleeing you, but are following me.  
When I bore shining standards on the waves,  
the pirates, driven from the sea, abandoning  
every creek within two moons, begged me  
for a narrow patch of dry land to inhabit.  
And when Mithridates, that indomitable king,  
challenged Rome's destiny, I drove him in flight  
along the isthmus of the Scythian Sea, and more  
fortunate than Sulla, brought about his death.  
I have left no part of the world untouched, my  
triumphs fill all the world, in whatever clime.  
The north knows of my victories, by Phasis' icy  
waters; the tropics of sultry Egypt and Syene  
where the shadows fall vertically, know me;  
the west fears my power, where the Baetis  
river, furthest towards sunset, meets the tide.  
The Arabs know me their conqueror; the warlike  
Heniochi, the Colchians, too, famed for the golden  
fleece stolen from them. Cappadocia fears my

standards, and Judea given to an unknown god,  
and effeminate Sophene, since I subdued Armenia,  
savage Cilicia, and the Taurus range. I have left  
my kinsman no war to wage but this civil war.'

## **Book II:596-649 Pompey flees to Brindisi**

Little or no applause followed the general's speech,  
nor did the soldiers clamour for the promised battle.  
Pompey was more than conscious of their fears, so  
recalled the standards rather than expose the army,  
already cowed by the rumour of Caesar's coming  
before he was yet in sight, to a decisive encounter.  
A bull driven from the herd after a first defeat seeks  
the depths of the forest glades and banished from  
the field tests his horns against the trunks of trees  
rather than his rivals, not returning to the pastures  
until he has regained his strength, satisfied once more  
with his innate powers; but once returned to the herd,  
those rivals conquered, he leads it, the young bulls  
following, wherever he wishes, defying the herdsman.  
Now Pompey surrendered Italy to the stronger man,  
and fled through Apulia's open fields until he found  
a much safer stronghold in the fortress of Brindisi.  
That city was founded by colonists from Dicte, exiles  
from Crete, borne on Athenian ships, whose sails  
falsely declared Theseus had been conquered.  
Italy narrows there and extends a slender tongue  
of land between confined shores, into the Adriatic  
whose waters are enclosed within curving horns.  
yet there would be no harbour in the narrow inlet  
if an island did not oppose the fierce northerlies  
with its barrier of stone, and defy the breakers.  
Nature has set great craggy cliffs on either side  
confronting the open sea, and thwarts the gales,  
so that ships ride at anchor there on slack cables.  
From there the waves are visible far and wide,

for ships bound for the harbours of Corfu, or  
those further north, where Illyrian Epidamnos  
slopes downwards towards the Ionian Sea.  
Here mariners find refuge when the Adriatic  
waves exert their power, when the Ceraunian  
mountains are lost in cloud, and the Calabrian  
Sason is drenched with foaming waves.  
Pompey lacked faith in the situation behind,  
nor could he carry the fight into Spain since  
the vast tract of the Alps lay between, so he  
said to Gnaeus, the eldest of his two sons:  
'I beg you to explore the furthest regions,  
rouse the Euphrates and the Nile, wherever  
the glory of my fame reaches, wherever  
Rome's name is known through my exploits.  
Tempt the Cilician colonists, now dispersed  
back to the coast, then rouse the kings of Egypt,  
and Tigranes of Armenia whom I made king,  
Consider too the Pontian army of Pharnaces,  
the nomad tribes of both Armenias, the savages  
along the Black Sea shore, Carpathia's hordes,  
and those whom the sluggish Sea of Azov,  
crossed by Scythian wagons when frozen,  
supports on its icy expanse. Without delay then,  
carry your father's standard through the East,  
and stir the cities everywhere I conquered  
to arms, let all I defeated rally to my camp.  
And you Lentulus and Marcellus, consuls  
whose names extend the Roman calendar,  
let the first northerly waft you to Epirus.  
Seek fresh forces in Greece and Macedon,  
while winter grants a lull to this warfare.'  
So Pompey, and they all obeyed his wishes,  
loosing their hollow ships from the shore.

**Book II:650-703 Caesar lays siege to Brindisi**

Yet Caesar, always impatient of peace, or any long  
cessation of warfare, lest fate might force change,  
followed close on the heels of his son-in-law.  
Others might have been content with seizing cities  
at the first assault, surprising strongholds, driving  
out their array of garrisons, until finding Rome  
itself, capital of the world, and the ultimate prize,  
an easy prey. But Caesar, impetuous in everything,  
thought nothing done while anything was left to do.  
He pressed onwards fiercely, and though master  
of all Italy, resenting that the land was still shared  
while Pompey claimed a foothold on the seashore,  
and yet on the other hand unwilling for his enemy  
to range the seas, he blocked the harbour with a mass  
of rubble, and levered rocks into the flowing waves.  
The endless labour was in vain, since the eager tide  
swallowed every boulder sinking them in the seabed.  
If Mount Eryx was drowned so, in the Aeolian Sea,  
or the toppled summit of Gaurus sunk in the Avernian  
Lake, no cliffs would likewise rise above the waters.  
When Caesar saw the stony masses would not hold,  
he ordered trees felled and bound together, a stretch  
of timber linked with chains, like the road, they say,  
proud Xerxes made, joining Europe to Asia, Sestos  
to Abydos, by his bridge, so his army might march  
over the straits of the swift-flowing Hellespont, free  
of the dread of easterly or westerly gales, conveying  
his ships under full sail to the heart of Mount Athos.  
So Caesar narrowed the exit to the sea by felling  
all the forest, and soon the mounds of earth and tall  
towers reared themselves high above the waves.  
Pompey, racked by doubt and anxiety, seeing new  
shores constrict his access to the water, pondered  
how he might break the siege and gain the ocean.  
Time after time, his vessels, driven before the wind,  
ropes straining, passed and re-passed the barriers  
that blocked the shore, hurled the booms into the tide



and granted the fleet sea-room; and time and again in the dead of night his machinery wound by strong arms launched a hail of multi-headed fire-brands. Fixing at last a day for secret flight, he gave orders to the crews to hold their tongues lest their shouts alarm the shore, no signal to mark the change of watch, no trumpet to alert the sailors, calling them on board. When the last stars of Virgo were rising, before Libra brought them the dawning day, silently they slipped their moorings, Without a cry the anchor flukes were dragged from the heavy sand; tall masts were hoisted and the yards rigged, while the captains stood there mute and anxious; sailors, dangling in the air, loosed the furled sails, tightening their lines, that the wind might not whistle through them. The general even prayed to the goddess, Fortuna, that she allow him to leave that Italy whose dominion she denied him. Fortune scarcely complied, since the sea-water struck by the prows roared chaotically, waves rose, the whole bay churned by the mingled wakes.

### **Book II:704-736 Pompey escapes by sea**

So the enemy, admitted through the open gates and within the walls, as the loyalty of the citizens, altering with their fortune, led them to yield the city, rushed eagerly along the horns of the curving harbour towards its entrance, angered that the ships had access to the sea. Shame on them that Pompey's flight was not victory enough! The channel that led the vessels out to sea was narrow, narrower than Euboea's gulf, by Chalcis. Here two ships, running aground, were seized by waiting soldiers, the fighting moved to shore, and here the sea was first turned crimson with the blood of civil war. Its rear-guard lost, the remaining fleet set course. Thus, when the Argo sailed from Thessaly for the Phasis, the Cyanean rocks clashed in the deep, but the ship

escaped the shock, though her stern was lost, while  
the closing cliffs vainly meeting empty air, were still.  
Now the altered colours of the eastern sky gave notice  
of the sun about to rise, and the reddened sky, not white  
as yet, robbed the nearest stars of their light; the Pleiades  
grew faint, Bootes circling Wain, dimming, merged  
indistinguishably with the sky, the brighter stars were  
quenched, the morning star fled before the light of day.  
Pompey by then, had gained the open sea, but the luck  
that aided his past hunts for pirates was his no longer,  
and Fortune, wearied by his triumphs, proved untrue.  
Taking his household with him, to war, driven out  
with his wife and sons, powerful still in exile, whole  
nations followed behind him. A far place was appointed  
for his undeserved destruction. To spare Italy, not  
to deprive him of a tomb in his native land, the gods  
doomed him to a grave in Egyptian sands; destiny  
would hide that wrong in a distant country, so that  
Roman soil was unstained by her Pompey's blood.

## **End of Book II**

### **Book III:1-45 Pompey's vision of Julia**

As a southerly, filling the swelling sails, drove the fleet on ploughing the open sea, the mariners gazed ahead over the Ionian waves. Pompey alone looked back towards Italy, as the harbours of his native land, a shore he would never see again, the cloudy hilltops, the mountain chains dimmed before his eyes and vanished. His weary flesh yielded then to drowsy slumber, in which he suddenly saw a vision: Julia, a phantom full of menace and terror, raising her sorrowful face above the yawning earth, stood there in the shape of a Fury amid the flames of her funeral pyre. 'Now,' she cried 'now as civil war began, driven from Elysian fields, the regions of the blessed, was I dragged down to Stygian darkness and the realm of guilty spirits. There I saw with these very eyes the Furies, torches in hand, roused to work strife between you; Charon, the ferryman of Acheron's scorched banks, waits for endless boatloads; Tartarus extends its borders to punish a host of sinners; the triple Parcae's hands are full, scarce equal to the task, the three sisters weary of snapping threads. Magnus, while I was your wife, you celebrated triumphs in joy, but then your fortune altered with your bride: Cornelia, my rival, doomed by fate to bring her husbands from rule to ruin, supplanted me before my funeral pyre grew cold. She can cling to your standard by land and sea, and welcome, if I have but power to trouble your sleep, robbing you of time for love-making; if Caesar occupies your days, let Julia have your nights. Not even Lethe's shore that brings forgetfulness could banish you from my memory; the monarchs of the dead permit me now to haunt you. When you fight I will appear in the midst of the field; my shade, my ghost, will not let you forget that you were spouse to Caesar's daughter. Sever in vain the tie of kinship that binds you. This civil war will make you mine.' So saying, the phantom fled, fading from her troubled husband's arms. Threatened thus with disaster,

by the gods and by the dead, Pompey only hastened more eagerly to his fate, his mind prepared for ruin. 'Why am I fearful,' he cried, 'of some empty spectral vision? Either the mind loses all sensation after death, or if not, then death is no great tragedy.' Now the sun sank towards the sea, as much of its fiery disk lost as the moon loses just before or after the full, and lo a benign shore offered the fleet an easy approach; they hauled in, lowered the masts, and rowed ashore.

### **Book III:46-83 Caesar marches on Rome**

As the wind snatched the ships from his grasp, as the sea hid Pompey's fleet, Caesar on the Italian shore, became a leader without rival. Yet he felt no pleasure in having driven Pompey far away, only resentment that his enemy had fled to safety abroad. Success no longer satisfied his eagerness for speed; even victory was not worth delay. Now he banished thoughts of battle from his mind, intent on the problems of peace, on how to win the fickle favour of the people, knowing that the price of corn was cause for popularity or its reverse. When men in power feed the idle mob they buy subservience, a starving people knows no fear, and hunger itself gives birth to freedom. Caesar therefore ordered Curio to Sicily, by way of Messina's straits where the sea inundated the land or severed it, turning what had been mainland to shore. The waves there work powerfully, the waters ever serving to prevent the cliffs once more making contact. Other troops were sent to Sardinia. Both islands are famous for their corn; no foreign fields supplied the granaries of Rome earlier or more abundantly. Libyan soils scarcely outdo them, though southerlies may fade, and northerlies drive clouds to those warmer climes, until

rains pour down to ensure a mighty harvest.  
Having taken these precautions, the general  
led his troops, unarmed, victorious, wearing  
the aspect of peace, to the city of his birth.  
Ah, if on his return to Rome he had merely  
conquered the north, and the Gallic tribes,  
what scenes of his exploits and his battles  
might have adorned his long procession  
through the City! The fetters he had laid  
on the sea and on the Rhine, his high chariot  
followed by noble Gauls and blonde Britons!  
How great a triumph he missed in adding  
to his conquests! No happy crowds met him  
on his march; but looks of silent dread, no throng  
gathered there to greet him, yet he was pleased  
to be feared, preferring their dread to their love.

### **Book III:84-140 Lucius Metellus defends the treasury**

He passed the craggy cliffs of Anxur, and where  
the mired way cleaves the Pontine Marshes, where  
Scythian Diana rules her hill-bound grove and temple,  
and where Roman consuls climb to Alba's heights.  
At last from a lofty place he sighted distant Rome.  
Seeing her again after so long warring in the north,  
he gazed in wonder as he addressed his native city:  
'Have men, whom no immediate threats of battle  
oppress, abandoned you, a dwelling place of gods?  
What other city then, dare hope to be defended?  
The gods be thanked that eastern savages, swift  
Sarmatians with Pannonian allies, or Getae joined  
by Dacians, have not chosen to descend on Italy!  
Fate is merciful that Romans, led by so feeble  
a general as Pompey, have only Romans to oppose.'  
So saying he entered a city paralysed by dread.  
For men believed that, as if capturing the city,  
he'd destroy the walls, blacken them with fire,

and scatter the statues of the gods. Such was the measure of their fear, they felt he owned the power to do as he wished. They could feign no words of welcome, nor, pretending pleasure, shout aloud with joy, scarcely free to utter curses. He lacked authority to summon the Senate, but a crowd of those city fathers, dragged from their hiding places, filled Palatine Apollo's temple. The consuls were absent from their sacred chairs, and the praetors, next in office, were not apparent, so their empty seats were carted from their places. Caesar was all in all, and the Senate forced to meet to hear the speeches of a mere private individual. If he had sought royal powers or divine honours, execution or exile for the senators, the assembled patricians would have sanctioned such. Happily, there was more that he blushed to request than they blushed to allow. Nevertheless, Freedom in her anger, sought in the person of a single man, to try if might would yield to right. Seeing brute force employed to burst the gates of the treasury, Saturn's temple, Metellus stubbornly hastened there, slipped through the ranks of Caesar's men and before the lock was shattered, stood before the gates. Thus we see that love of money is a true proof against fear of death. The loss and destruction of the constitution made no stir, but gold, least of all things, prompted action. This tribune, trying to bar the conqueror from theft, cried: 'Over my dead body shall the temple fall to your assault; you'll win no gold by robbery, unless drenched in our sacred blood. The violence done our office will surely bring down vengeance from the gods, just so the tribune's curse which sought defeat for Crassus followed him to war. Draw your sword then, fear no crowd of witnesses. The city is abandoned by its own, yet our wealth should not go to pay your evil soldiery, there are nations to defeat, cities for you to grant them.

Nor does indigence drive you to despoil the peace  
you thrust aside; for you have war itself to enrich you.’  
His speech filled Caesar with profound indignation:  
‘Metellus,’ he cried, ‘you may hope for death’s glory,  
but this hand of mine will not be stained by your blood.  
Your office cannot make you worthy of my wrath.  
Are you then the champion who will secure liberty?  
The centuries have not wrought such confusion  
that should the voice of Metellus defend them,  
the laws would not rather be trampled on by Caesar.’

### **Book III:141-168 The treasury is seized**

So Caesar spoke, his anger deepening, as the tribune  
still refused to quit the gates; forgetting the citizen’s  
part and looking instead towards his ruthless soldiers.  
But now a fellow tribune, Cotta, persuaded Metellus  
to forsake his over-bold intent, saying: ‘When a nation  
is oppressed by tyranny, freedom of speech may rob  
us of our freedom, while a semblance is preserved if we  
agree to its demands. That, overcome, we have suffered  
acts of coercion, such is the sole excuse for our disgrace  
our abject fear, that to refuse was in no way possible.  
Let Caesar carry off these baneful seeds of accursed  
war, as swiftly as he may: nations protected by law  
may feel a loss of wealth, the poverty of slaves is  
not theirs but their master’s.’ Metellus was drawn aside  
while the temple gates were swiftly opened. Loud  
the Tarpeian Rock re-echoed to the grating noise  
as the doors parted; then Rome’s wealth, untouched  
in the vaults for many a year, was brought outside;  
treasure from the Punic Wars, and those with Perses  
of Macedon, the spoil of conquered Philip, the gold  
that Brennus the Gaul forfeited to Rome in flight,  
and that which could not bribe Fabricius to sell  
the city to Pyrrhus; all that our ancestors saved  
with care, all the tribute paid by the rich nations

of Asia, or given victorious Metellus by Minoan  
Crete, or brought by Cato from distant Cyprus.  
The wealth of the Orient, the treasure of captive  
kings borne in Pompey's triumph was revealed.  
Tragic the plunder that despoiled the temple,  
and first made Rome poorer than its Caesar.

### **Book III:169-213 Greece and Asia Minor rally to Pompey**

Meanwhile Pompey's fame had stirred nations everywhere  
to war, those destined to share his fate. Greece the nearest  
sent soldiers to her neighbour's battle: Amphissa sent men  
from Phocis, rocky Cirrha too, and both Parnassus' peaks  
were deserted. Boeotia's leaders gathered, those whom  
swift Cephissus' and Cadmean Dirce's oracular streams  
embrace; men came from Pisa and the Alpheus whose  
waters flow beneath the waves to the Sicilian shore.  
Arcadians quit Maenalus, and the soldiers of Trachis  
left Hercules' Oeta behind. Thesprotians and Dryopes  
rushed to fight, and the Selloi abandoned their silent  
oracle of oak-trees on the ancient hillside of Chaonia.  
The levy drained Athens of all her men, though few  
of her ships gathered at Apollonia, and three vessels  
alone bore witness to historic Salamis. Next to rally  
to the cause was Crete, isle dear to Zeus, ancient  
island of a thousand cities, Cnossos skilled in archery,  
and Gortyn whose bowmen rivalled those of Parthia.  
They were followed by those who dwelt in Trojan  
Oricos, the scattered Athamanes who roam mountain  
forests, and the Encheliae whose ancient name refers  
to Cadmus' death and his transformation to a snake.  
Men came too from the Colchian Absyrtides round  
which the Adriatic foams, those came who till the fields  
of Haemonian Iolcos, where the untried Argo first left  
the shore, challenged the waves, and forged links  
between alien nations, pitting men against the storms  
and ocean breakers, bringing a new manner of death.



Next Thracian Mount Haemus was abandoned, then  
Pholoe with its pure myth of the bi-formed Centaurs.  
Strymon was deserted, that each year sends Bistonia's  
cranes to winter by the Nile, and barbarous Cone where  
one mouth of the branching Danube sheds its Sarmatian  
waters and bathes Peuce's isle sprinkled by the waves.  
Mysia too was deserted; the land of Idalus drenched  
by Caicus' chill waters; Arisbe's all too shallow soil.  
The people of Pitane gathered, and those of Celaenae  
who mourn Pallas' invention of the flute, Celaenae  
condemned with Marsyas when Apollo won the contest.  
There the Marsya running swiftly in its straight course  
meets the winding Maeander, and merging turns about,  
and there earth emits the Pactolus in seams of gold,  
and Hermus, rich as Pactolus, dissects the cornfields.  
The soldiers of ever ill-fated Ilium joined the standards  
of the doomed army too, untroubled by the tale of Troy,  
or by Caesar's boast of his descent from Trojan Iulus.

### **Book III:214-263 The Middle East and India rally to Pompey**

The tribes of Syria followed, from the Orontes and Nineveh  
of whose riches legend tells; they abandoned wind-swept  
Damascus, Gaza, and Idume rich in palm-trees; Tyre  
subject to earthquake; Sidon precious for its purple dyes.  
Setting unerring course for war, they steered their ships  
by the pole-star, that star to them above all the safest guide.  
These, the Phoenicians, if the legend is true, first sought  
to record language in written characters for the future,  
before Egypt learned to bind papyrus reeds, when only  
hieroglyphs of birds, wild beasts, and other creatures,  
preserved the secrets of its speech. Men left the woods  
of Tauros, Tarsus where Perseus landed, and the cave  
above Corycus where the earth yawns wide in a hollow.  
Mallos and far-off Aigai are loud with sounding shipyards;  
the Cilicians, pirates no more, set sail in true ships of war.  
News of war reached further east, where Ganges descends,

Ganges that alone on earth opens its mouths directly towards the rising sun, and drives its current on against the easterlies; nearby it was that Alexander was forced to halt, believing the outer ocean beyond, yet confessing himself defeated by the world's vastness. Now the land was roused where Indus too, its current flowing swiftly with additional force, barely feels the addition of the Hydaspes to its wide waste. The tribes rallied who drink sweet juice from sugar-canes; those who dye their hair with saffron dye, and gird their cotton robes with bright jewels; those who build funeral pyres, climb on the burning logs, and immolate themselves. How glorious to seize fate in one's hands and, satiated with life, let what remains be gifted back to the gods! Savage Cappadocians rallied to the cause; those men who find the soil of Mount Amanus far too hard; also the Armenians who live where Niphates rolls its boulders, And the Choatrae abandoned their sky-reaching forests. The Arabs entered a world unknown to them, amazed that the shadows of trees no longer fell southwards. The madness of Rome even troubled the remote Orestae; and the chieftains of Carmania, where the more southerly heavens still reveal the Bear not wholly sunken below the horizon, where Bootes, swift to set there, is visible only for a brief part of the night; and Ethiopia, which no part of the northern constellations would cover if the foreleg of rearing Taurus was not bent so that the tip of his hoof projected downwards; and it troubled Parthia where the mighty Euphrates and the swift Tigris raise their streams from sources not far apart in Persia, such that if earth allowed them to meet, who could say which would conquer. Yet the Euphrates spreading over the land fertilises the ground as the Nile does Egypt's, while the Tigris is suddenly swallowed by a chasm in the earth which hides its course until giving birth to it again in another place, allowing the river to reach the sea.

### **Book III:264-297 The Black Sea and North Africa rally to Pompey**

The warlike Parthians favoured neither Caesar's forces nor the armies who opposed him, content to see them rivals. But the nomadic tribes of Scythia, bounded by Bactros' chill streams, and the vast forests of Hyrcania, refreshed their poisoned arrows. The Heniochi came, of Spartan descent, dangerous on horseback, the Sarmatians too, akin to the savage Moschi. Men marched from the regions where the Phasis cleaves the Colchians' rich fields, where the Halys flows that doomed Croesus, where the Tanais falling from the Rhiphaean heights, bounds Asia on the one side and Europe on the other, granting the names of two worlds to its banks, separating them and with its winding adding now to one continent now the other; and where the Black Sea gathers the flow from the Maeotian Lake, so that men deny that Cadiz is the only outlet to the Ocean, and Hercules' Pillars are robbed of their uniqueness. From another region came the Essedonian tribes, the Arimaspians who bind their hair with loops of gold, the brave Arians, the Massegetae who quench their thirst after battle with the Sarmatians by bleeding the horse they rode, and the swift Geloni. Neither Cyrus, leading an army from the east, his Persians numbered by each soldier casting a dart, nor Agamemnon seeking vengeance for the wrong done Menelaus, neither cut the waves with so great a fleet. Never did so many kings obey a single leader, nor so many nations, strangely garbed, meet together with such great confusion of languages. Fate stirred the peoples and sent them as companions to a great disaster, as a funeral train fit for Pompey's exequies. Even horned Ammon was not slow to send squadrons from Africa to battle, from all parched Libya, from Morocco in the west to Egyptian Syrtes in the east. So that Caesar, fortune's favourite, might win all with a single throw, Pharsalia brought all the world to battle.

### **Book III:298-357 Marseille opposes Caesar**

Leaving the walls of a fearful Rome, Caesar now marched swiftly beyond the cloud-capped Alps, where the Phocaeans colonists of Marseilles, free of Greek fickleness, dared when others trembled in terror at the sound of his name to be loyal and true to their oaths in a doubtful hour, following right rather than fortune. Still, at first, they tried to mollify Caesar's fierce determination and harsh will, with peaceful representations, and when his army drew near spoke thus, proffering Minerva's olive-branch: 'All the annals of Italian history bear witness that Marseilles has shared the Roman people's destiny in their foreign wars. Now too our swords are ready to oppose those foreigners, should you seek fresh triumphs in some unknown land. But if Italy is divided, if you intend ill-omened campaigns, and cursed war, we mourn that civil strife, and step aside. If the sky-dwellers armed themselves in anger, or the Giants, born of Earth, attacked the heavens, pious men would shrink still from helping Jupiter with prayers or weapons. No other should interfere in a sacred quarrel. The human race, not knowing of events above, would seek to learn from his lightning bolts alone if the Thunderer still ruled the sky without a rival. Moreover innumerable nations are rushing to the fray from every quarter; nor are men so reluctant for a fight, so averse to the contagion of evil, that civil war needs involve coercion. We ourselves however wish all men shared our resolve, to refuse to share Rome's destiny; and that no foreign soldier would take arms in your quarrel. What Roman will not be troubled, or hindered from hurling his spear, seeing father or brothers ranked among the foe? Civil war would end swiftly if you enlisted only those whom it is lawful to enlist. This is the burden of our petition to you: leave the dread eagles and menacing standards far from our city, and entrust yourself to our walls. Let us admit Caesar and exclude the war. Let there be one place free of evil,

neutral ground for Pompey and yourself. Then if Fortune shows mercy to an unconquered Rome, and you choose peace, both will retain a place in which to meet unarmed. When Spain summons you at this point of crisis, why direct your swift forces towards us? We are of little weight or moment; a people never victorious in war. Driven from our ancient place, when Phocaea burnt and her towers were razed, we fled to this foreign shore, and owe our security to our fragile walls; our only claim to fame is our loyalty. If you seek to blockade the city, or storm the gates, then we are ready; our houses will survive your burning missiles; should you divert our springs we will dig for transient water and lick with our parched tongues the soil we dig; if bread is scarce we will defile our mouths by eating things foul to see and hideous to touch. We do not fear, in defending freedom, to share the miseries that Saguntum bravely suffered. Let our babes, sucking in vain at breasts run dry through famine, torn then from their mother's arms, be hurled into the flames; let wives seek death at the hands of their beloved husband; let brother deal wound to brother, choose, if forced to do so, that dire expression of civil war.' So the Greeks spoke, and Caesar's anger, already visible in his darkened face, betrayed his resentment in speech:

### **Book III:358-398 Caesar blockades the city**

'These Greeks trust in my need for haste, but in vain; though I may be hastening to the west there is time to destroy Marseilles. Rejoice, men! Through a gift of fate you are offered battle. Just as a storm loses strength, and dissipates in the void, or a conflagration dies when nothing obstructs its passage, so the absence of enemies weakens me, and I deem my weapons idle if those who might have been conquered evade me. They say their city is open to me if I disband my army, entering alone and vulnerable. Their true purpose

more subtle than simply to bar me, is to imprison me. They say they wish to avoid the taint of war, but they shall suffer for seeking peace, and learn that in my days none are safe but those I lead to war.' So saying, he led an advance against the fearless city, whose gates he soon saw closed, and its walls defended by a ring of warriors. Not far from the walls a hill rose from the plain, with a small stretch of level ground at its summit. This height seemed to him ripe for fortification, providing a secure site to pitch camp. The nearest aspect of the city rose in a tall fortress as high as this hilltop, and the ground between was pitted with hollows. Caesar's strategy involved vast labour, to link the opposing heights with an immense earthen rampart. But first, in order to blockade the city on its landward side, he threw out a long line of works from his hilltop camp to the sea, whose ditch deprived the city of its freshwater springs and pastures, and built earthworks with soil and turf crowned by a solid battlement. This alone was fame enough for the Greek colony, fame and eternal glory, that it was not overcome by mere terror, but halted the headlong onrush of war that swept all the world, and delayed Caesar's total conquest, by its resistance. How great a thing it was, to hold back destiny, cause Fortune to lose time, as she hastened to set Caesar above the whole world. Now all the trees must be felled, the forests stripped of timber far and wide, for since brushwood and soft soil made for too weak a structure, timber was needed to constrain and bind the earth, to stop it sinking under the turrets' weight.

### **Book III:399-452 Caesar destroys the sacred grove**

There was a grove, untouched through long centuries, whose interlacing boughs enclosed cold and shadowy depths, the sunlight banished far above. It was sacred to no rural Pan, no Silvanus king of the wood, nor

to the Nymphs, but gods were worshipped there with savage rites, the altars piled high with foul offerings, and every tree drenched in human blood. On those boughs, if ancient tales, respectful of deity, may be believed, the birds feared to perch; in those coverts no wild beast would lie; on that grove no wind ever blew, no lightning bolt from the storm clouds fell; and the trees, spreading their leaves to an absent breeze, rustled of themselves. Water flowed there in copious dark streams, while the images of the gods, rough-hewn and grim, were merely crude blocks cut from felled trunks of trees. But their very age itself, and the ghastly colour of their rotting timber struck terror; men feel less awe of deities in familiar forms; their fear increases when the gods they dread appear as alien shapes. They also say the subterranean caves often shook and roared, that yew-trees fell and then rose again, that flame glowed from trees free of fire, while serpents slithered and twined about their trunks. The people never gathered there to worship; they had abandoned the place to the gods, and when the sun was at the zenith, or night's blackness seized the sky, the priest himself dreaded those moments, afraid of surprising the lord of the wood. This grove Caesar ordered felled by the stroke of the axe. Growing near his outworks, spared by earlier wars, it stood clothed in trees among hills already bare. But now strong arms faltered, his soldiers awed by the solemn majesty of the place believed that if they struck the sacred trees, their axes would rebound to sever their own limbs. Caesar, seeing his soldiers paralysed and afraid, seized an axe and was the first to strike, daring to fell a towering oak-tree with its blade. Driving his axe into the desecrated timber, he cried: 'Any sacrilege falls on me: now none of you need fear to strike.' Then all the men obeyed his orders, their minds

still uneasy, their fears not assuaged, but weighing  
Caesar's anger against the wrath of heaven.  
Ash trees fell, gnarled ilexes were tumbled,  
while oracular oaks, alders fitted for the waves,  
cypresses that bore witness to a king's grief,  
all lost their leaves for the first time. Robbed  
of their foliage they let in the light, the toppling  
trunks supported, as they fell, by their neighbours.  
The Gauls were grieved by the sight, yet the besieged  
rejoiced in their belief that such injury to the gods  
could not go unpunished, though fortune often serves  
the guilty, the gods' wrath reserved for the wretched.  
When enough timber had been felled, waggons  
were brought to carry it, while farmers, robbed  
of their oxen, mourned for the unploughed fields.

### **Book III:453-496 Caesar leaves for Spain, the siege continues**

But Caesar impatient of this protracted siege of the walls  
led an army towards Spain and the ends of Europe,  
giving orders for the blockade to continue. The rampart  
was extended with a lattice of timber, two turrets tall  
as the walls set on it; their foundations were not driven  
into the earth but they sat on rollers moved covertly.  
When it creaked under its burden, the besieged thought  
it the winds trying to break from their hollow cavern,  
and wondered their walls remained standing. From  
these towers missiles were hurled against the citadel,  
but the Greek projectiles hit the Romans harder  
since their javelins not merely thrown but also  
hurled from the arms of powerful catapults pierced  
more than one body before they halted, cleaving  
their swathe through armour and bone, gone by,  
leaving death behind, having dealt it passing on.  
Each boulder driven by the impulse as the tension  
was released, shattered everything in its path, like  
a section of weathered cliff that a sudden gale



tears from the mountain-side, not simply crushing life from its victims, but annihilating flesh and bone. Yet when brave soldiers approached the wall in close formation, with shields overlapping those behind, their heads defended by the roof they made, the missiles which had dealt death flew by them, while it was difficult for the Greeks to alter range and redirect their engines designed to hurl their bolts a certain distance. They were forced to hurl boulders down using their arms alone, relying on the weight. As long as it continued the mass of shields repelled every missile, like a roof rattling harmlessly in a burst of hail; but when the soldiers' strength and courage wavered, forcing gaps in the defence, the shields gave way one by one under the relentless assault. Next boards lightly covered with turf were brought forward, and the besiegers screened by the boards with covered fronts, worked to sap the foundations with iron tools and crack the walls. Now the ram was used, its swinging blows effective, its impact seeking to damage the wall's solid structure, by dislodging stones supporting those above; but scorched by fire from on high, struck by huge and jagged stones, by a rain of missiles, and blows from oak shafts hardened in the flames, the boards with their loads of turf gave way and the besiegers, foiled for all their efforts, retired wearily to their tents.

### **Book III:497-537 The Romans initiate a naval battle**

To defend the walls was the most the Greeks had hoped for, yet now they prepared a night offensive. Grasping burning torches behind their shields, their warriors advanced boldly, fire was their weapon not spears or death-dealing arrows, and the wind, driving the flames carried them swiftly over the Roman lines. Despite the green wood the fire was quick to show its power, leaping from every torch in the wake of vast

volumes of black smoke, it ate not only timber but hard stone; and great rocks were shattered to dust. Ramparts tumbled, appearing even more voluminous spread over the ground. Abandoning all hope of a victory by land, the Romans chose to try their luck by sea. Vessels bare of paint, unadorned with gleaming figure-heads, rough timbers, as they were cut in the hills, were strapped together to form platforms for waterborne attack, while Caesar's admiral, Decimus, sailing down the Rhone ahead of the fleet had reached the sea and anchored off the Stoechades. The Greeks were as ready to chance their fortunes, mingling old men with youths in the ranks, manning their fleet that rode at anchor, stripping the dockyards of ships retired from service. Now Phoebus scattered splinters of morning light over the waves, the sky was unclouded, the northerlies and southerlies peaceful and at rest, the sea calm as if spread for battle. Every ship released from its moorings, the rival fleets leapt towards each other equally, Caesar on one side, Greeks on the other, the hulls quivering to the beat of oars, rapid strokes driving the tall ships through the water. The arms of the Roman fleet were a mix of vessels, triremes, quadriremes, and even a few with extra banks of oars, tiered one above the other, these ships, the heaviest, set as barrier against the open water, while the galleys with their double banks of oars, lay further back in a crescent formation. Towering above them all was Decimus' flagship with its six banks of oars, shadowing the deep as it advanced, those of the uppermost tier reaching for the waves.

### **Book III:538-582 The fleets engage**

When only as much water parted the fleets as each could cover with one mighty stroke of the oars, countless shouts rose to the heavens above, until the splash of blades was drowned out by the cries,

and the trumpets went unheard. Then, straining against the thwarts behind them, oars against their chests, the crews drove forward over the sea, backing astern again as prow clashed with prow, while a volley of missiles plunged from the sky, clouding the heavens and the sea as they fell. The Romans now deployed the wings, in open order; the space between the vessels allowing entrance to the enemy ships. As the waves are driven in one direction, when the tide opposes an easterly or westerly wind, while the mass of water moves on in another, so, as the vessels ploughed their distinct furrows through the sea, the water thrown back by one ship's set of oars was thrown by another in the opposite direction. Though the Greek ships were handier in attack or retreat, swiftly tacking to change course, quick to answer the helm's guidance, the Roman ships had this advantage, that they offered a steadier platform for fighting, a foothold firm as dry land. Now Decimus hailed the helmsman at the ensign on the poop: 'Don't let the fleet wander the waves, ignore the enemy manoeuvres. Gather the ships together, offer our side to the Phocaeen prows!' The helmsman obeyed, exposing the ship broadside to the foe. Each ship attacking the flagship's flank was defeated by the blow, a captive wedded to the vessel it had rammed. Others were caught by grappling irons, chains, or entangled in their oars. The waves were hidden, and the battle stationary. Spears were no longer flung by vigorous arms, wounds were no longer inflicted from a distance, they fought hand to hand, the sword doing most damage in that sea battle. Each man leaned from the bulwarks of his own vessel to strike at the foe, and none fell on deck. Their blood dyed the wave, and a crimson foam veiled the sea. Ships caught

by the iron chains made no contact for the mass of corpses. Some men sank alive in the depths, drowning in brine and blood, others while still breathing, struggling against slow death, died from the sudden plunge of their doomed vessel. Weapons that missed their target killed men in the water randomly; every missile that fell, its blow awry, still found a victim in the waves.

### **Book III:583-634 The death of Catus**

One Roman ship, hemmed in by Phocaeen vessels, defended herself to port and starboard, her crew separating to man the sides with equal courage. Catus, fighting at the rear, grasping the ornament on the enemy stern, boldly, was pierced in chest and back by weapons launched together; they met in his flesh, the blood stayed for a moment its outlet uncertain; at last its pressure dislodged both javelins at once, dealing a double death, apportioning out his life between the wounds. Here ill-fated Telo steered his craft; no ship on stormy sea was more obedient to any hand than his; no helmsman could better forecast the weather from observation of sun or moon, and so set his sails to the coming breeze. Telo would have rammed the Romans broadside on had not their spears pierced his chest, so that the dying helmsman's hand drove the ship aside. Though Gyareus tried to clamber over and take his friend's place, a grapnel, flung, caught him by the waist as he hung in the air, and there he remained held fast by that snare to the gunwale. Twin brothers fighting there, their mother's pride and joy, born of the same womb were destined for different fates. Death's cruel hand distinguished between them, and the wretched parents, no longer

puzzling over which was which, found in the sole survivor the single source of their unending sorrow, since he recalled the lost brother to their mournful thoughts and kept their grief ever-present. The one had dared to grasp the gunwale of a Roman vessel, their oars overlapping entangling the two ships. His hand was severed by a downward blow, but still gripped the side stiffening as the blood left it. His courage rose though with disaster, and mutilated he showed an even more heroic ardour. Fiercely he continued the fight, but reaching his left hand out to retrieve his right, that too and the whole arm were severed. Then deprived of shield and sword, in full view not hidden by the bulwarks, he defended his brother with his own bared breast, standing firm though pierced by many a weapon, and though he had already chanced death many times, stopping spears that would have taken many lives in their fall. Then he gathered his remaining strength, though his life was ebbing due to many wounds, and bracing his dying limbs, with the power left him, he sprang on board the Roman ship, his weight his sole advantage, since his muscles had lost their force. The ship was drenched with blood, piled high with the bodies of her crew. She suffered blow after blow on her side, that shattered let in the sea, and filling to her decks she sank into the waves, sucking the waters round her into a whirlpool. The sea parted as the ship sank, and then fell back into the space she had occupied. Many another form of death too was seen that day on the deep.

### **Book III:635-669 The death of Lycidas**

So Lycidas was caught by the flukes of a grappling iron flung swiftly on board, and would have sunk in the sea but for his friends who seized his legs as they swung

in the air. He was ripped apart though, and his blood spurted out through the severed arteries, not trickling as from a single wound but gushing forth, till the play of blood flowing from the several limbs merged with the waves. No other victim spilt his blood so widely, the lower limbs lacking vital organs soon drained, but the air-filled lungs and beating heart long baffled death that wrestled with the man till it had mastered all. On another ship the crew, over-eager for the fight, leaning over the one gunwale where the enemy lay, overbalanced the craft with their collective weight, till she toppled on her side with them beneath, unable to rise free, dying in their watery prison. On that day too a dreadful death without precedent was witnessed. A man in the water was pierced by the beaks of two ships meeting, his chest split in two by the dire impact, the bones crushed so the body could not halt the clash of bronze prows. The belly was flattened, blood and gore spouted from the mouth, and when the ships backed water and the prows disengaged, only then the corpse with shattered breast sank, and the water poured through its remains. Most of another crew swam when shipwrecked to seek help from another crew, but catching the gunwale, they were warned away, since the ship was unstable and destined to sink if they were taken aboard, so the other crew, pitiless, hacked at the gripping hands with sharp swords. Their hands still clinging to the Greek ship they fell away, leaving their severed limbs behind, no longer able to support their mutilated bodies on the surface.

### **Book III:670-708 The death of Phoeceus**

By now all the combatants had flung their missiles, but empty-handed their fury still found weapons. One hurled an oar towards the enemy, other

strong arms launched a whole stern-piece,  
and turning the rowers out tore up the thwarts  
as missiles, breaking up the vessel for ammunition.  
Snatching at sinking corpses they robbed them  
of the shafts that had killed them. Many a man,  
lacking a weapon dragged the javelin from his own  
wound and clutching his innards with his other hand  
gathered remaining strength for a vital stroke,  
hurling back the spear before his blood poured out.  
No power brought more destruction in that sea-fight  
however, than the element most hostile to the waves,  
since fire spread everywhere carried by resinous  
torches, and fuelled by sealed-in sulphur, so that  
the ships, with their caulking of pitch and wax swift  
to melt and burn, instantly caught fire. Nor did waves  
quench the fire, the flames gripping the wreckage now  
scattered over the deep. Some sailors let in the water  
to try and douse the fires, others fearful of drowning  
still clinging to the burning timbers; among a thousand  
ways of dying, men fear that most in which death first  
draws near. Courage does not falter with shipwreck:  
they snatched weapons flung into the waves passing  
them to the living, or dealt feeble blows with errant  
aim from the water. Some, lacking other weapons,  
employed the deep; enemy fiercely clasping enemy,  
they gladly locked limbs and sank, drowning as they  
drowned the foe. One warrior, Phoceus, could hold  
his breath underwater longer than all others, used  
to searching the depths for whatever the sands had  
taken, or wrenching the flukes free when an anchor  
biting too hard refused to answer to the cable's tug.  
He had grappled now with his enemy, dragging him  
deep below, and now victorious was surfacing alive  
thinking to rise unobstructed, but struck the keel  
of a ship and sank again. Some men grasped the oars  
of the foe to check their vessels' flight, anxious not  
to waste their lives, many a dying man stopping

an enemy craft from ramming the stern of his ship,  
by presenting his own wounded body to its prow.

### **Book III:709-751 The death of Argus**

One Lygdamus, a Balearic sling-thrower, hurled  
a missile, and aiming at Tyrrhenus who stood high  
at the ship's bow crushed the hollow of his temples  
with the ball of lead, so that the ligaments were torn  
and the eyes bleeding driven from their sockets.  
Tyrrhenus, stunned by his sudden blindness, thought  
it the darkness of death, but feeling that his limbs  
still had their strength, he called to his companions:  
'Set me where you have set the missile-throwers,  
in the correct place for hurling spears. Tyrrhenus  
must use what life remains in some warlike way.  
This ruined flesh can still play the soldier's part:  
I shall find death instead of some man still whole.'  
With this, he threw a javelin blindly at the foe,  
but still found a mark. It struck Argus, a noble  
youth, at the junction of the groin and lower  
belly, and he drove the steel deeper in falling.  
His unfortunate father, at the further end of the ship,  
beyond the immediate fight, would in his prime  
have matched any Phocaeen; age had robbed him  
of strength, yet though he could no longer fight  
he could still direct others. Seeing his son's deadly  
wound, he stumbled sternwards among the benches  
and found Argus still breathing. Bereft of tears, his  
hands instead of beating at his breast flying wide  
apart, his body became rigid, darkness overcame  
him veiling his sight, so that he ceased to see the sad  
form of Argus before him, while the son, finding his  
father there, raised his bowed head, speechlessly,  
no words issuing from his throat, but seeking  
with a silent look, his father's embrace at the last,  
and that his father's hand might close his eyes.



As the old man recovered from his swoon, cruel sorrow asserted its power. He cried: 'I shall not waste what remaining life the ruthless gods grant, but will use it to slit this aged throat. Argus, forgive your father for denying you a last embrace, a parting kiss. The blood still flows warm from your wound, and you still breathe; you may yet die after me.' So saying, not content with thrusting the sword through his body to the hilt, he sprang headlong into the sea, so eager to die before his son that he would not trust to a single mode of death.

### **Book III:752-762 Decimus wins the encounter**

The issue was no longer in the balance, the outcome of the siege was decided. Most of the Greek fleet was sunk, others were now crewed by the victors, only an unconquered few gaining harbour by a hasty flight. What tears the city shed, how loud the lament of mothers on the shore! Many a wife embraced a Roman corpse in error, mistaking its features, disfigured by the battle, for her husband's. Soon, beside the lighted pyres, wretched father struggled with father for possession of some headless body, while Decimus with his naval victory brought Caesar's forces their first glory on the waves.

### **End of Book III**

#### **Book IV:1-47 Caesar attacks Ilerda (Lleida) in Spain**

But far off at the edge of Europe, fierce Caesar was waging war, not with great loss of life but with warfare destined to influence the fates of the two rivals decisively. Afranius and Petreius were the joint leaders of Pompey's army in Spain; of one mind, they ruled alternately, equal in authority, sharing responsibility, the diligent sentries guarding the ramparts honouring their successive passwords. As well as the Roman troops they commanded ready Asturians, nimble Vettones, and Celts, settlers from an ancient Gallic tribe, merging their own name to that of the Iberians, the Celtiberians. Where fertile land rises in gentle slopes to a hill of modest height, Ilerda (Lleida) stands, an ancient settlement. The quiet waters of the Sicoris (Segre) flow by, not the least of European rivers, and the solid stone arch of a bridge able to withstand winter floods spans them. Pompey's army occupied a steep hill nearby, while Caesar had pitched camp on another equal height, the river flowing between them and separating the two camps. Beyond stretch level plains as far as the eye can see, while the fast-flowing Cinga (Cinca) bounds the plains whose waters reach the sea under another name, since it merges with the Hiberus (Ebro) which gives its name to the whole country. The first days of the war were free of bloodshed: serving only to reveal the extent of each leaders' forces, and their might. War seemed loathsome; shame restrained the frenzy of battle, a day's respite was granted the land and the rule of law. But as the sun sank towards night, Caesar fortified a new site with a swiftly dug trench, while the front ranks kept their ground, screening the place, behind the lines of troops, and deceiving the enemy. At dawn he ordered the men forward at speed, climbing the slopes which lay between the site and Ilerda, those protecting the town. Fear and shame drove the enemy to advance rapidly, reach the slopes and occupy them. The courage and fighting strength of Caesar's men promised him attainment of the ground, but the enemy relied on

actual possession. The heavily-burdened soldiers struggled to climb the heights, the front ranks gazing upwards, supported by the shields of those behind. None was free to fling a weapon; each planted his javelin again and again to secure a perilous foothold, clutching at rocks and trees, hacking a path with his sword, oblivious of the enemy. Seeing how risky the position was, Caesar ordered the cavalry to advance and wheel to the left, to shield the troops. The infantry were quickly rescued, without pursuit; the enemy held the slopes as their foe retreated, gaining little.

#### **Book IV:48-120 Caesar's camp is flooded**

Such was the passage of arms; the rest of the campaign was determined by various spells of adverse weather. Winter constrained it with numbing cold and dry northerlies, gripping the upper atmosphere and restricting the rainfall. Only the mountains saw snow, while hoar frost covered the low-lying plains, vanishing at the first glimpse of sun; all the land towards the west hard and dry in the cloudless winter weather. But when spring came, and Aries, the ram from whom Helle fell, received the burning sun, and rose before the other signs; and then, weighed once again in unerring Libra's balance, day gained the victory; so the moon, retreating from the sun, and barely visible at the new crescent, shut out the north wind, brightening while an easterly blew, which drove the clouds westward in blasts from Arabia, all those gathered in its own region, all the mists the Arabs know, or Ganges exhales, all the moisture the orient's sun allows, all that the gale that darkens the east impels, and all that screens India from the sun. Day, there, was heated by a lack of clouds, unable to release their burden of rain on the land below, and instead carrying the moisture with them as they fled. To north and south it was dry, while all the rainclouds streamed towards Calpe. There where the west winds

rise, and the furthest bounds of the sky contain the sea, the clouds, prevented from progressing, gathered into dense masses; and the sky between earth and space could scarcely hold the dark accumulations of mist. Compressed beneath the heavens they flowed thickly, the moisture condensing as rain; the lightning flashed endlessly but was drowned in the constant downpour. A rainbow's broken arch spanned the sky, its spectrum of colours dim; it seemed to drink the ocean, returning water swiftly to the clouds, restoring that which poured from the sky. Then the Pyrenean snows, which no sun ever thawed, melted, the ice dissolved and the rocks were drenched. Such a flood of water poured into every channel, that the streams issuing from their usual founts no longer held their banks. Now Caesar's army afloat on land foundered, his camp dissolved with the force of the inundation, and the streams formed pools inside his high ramparts. There was no way to locate cattle; the furrows submerged the crops were ruined; the men who sought plunder struggled over waterlogged fields, deceived by the vanishing of tracks beneath the flood. Now came the famine, cruel famine that follows first in the aftermath of great disasters, the soldiers starving with no enemy at hand, giving their little wealth, though no spendthrifts, for a handful of grain. A plague on pale avarice! For gold, even the starving will sell their grain. Now even hills submerged; the rivers beneath the flood were swallowed by the vast reaches of a single lake, which drowned the rocks in its depths, filling the lairs engulfing the wild creatures, its loud waters churning with sudden eddies, and even repelling the ocean tide. Night veiling the sky was unaware of sunrise, all natural distinctions were lost in the endless darkness, the dread complexion of the sky. Such are the farthest regions of the world, in the icy zone of perpetual winter, where no stars are visible, and the barren cold bearing nothing only tempers the fire of the equatorial signs.

O supreme Father of the universe, and you, O Neptune, to whom fate granted a lesser power over the ocean, (such was the prayer) may it be your will, that one god fills the sky with endless rain, while the other stops the tide from ever ebbing again! Let the rivers find no passage to the sea, but be held back by the waves! Let the earth quake and extend the river courses, let Rhine and Rhone flood Spanish fields! Bring down the melted snows of the Rhiphaean mountains, bring the waters of every pond and lake and stagnant marsh throughout the world, and keep the land from civil war.

#### **Book IV:121-156 The campaign is renewed**

But Fortune, content with having troubled her favourite a little, returned in full flow, and the gods earned pardon with a mighty show of support, for the skies cleared, the sun more than a match for the rain broke the dense cloud into fleecy vapours, and the dark sky grew red at dawn. The elements occupied their proper regions, the heavens were free of moisture and the water that had fallen settled to the lowest levels. Trees raised their heads, hills rose above the flood, and valleys grew firm again in the warmth of sunlight. As soon as Sicoris retreating from the plains showed its banks, osiers from hoary willows were steeped and plaited to make coracles, covered with ox-skin, that could carry passengers, and safely ride the swollen rivers. So the Venetians do, to sail the flooded River Po, and the Britons their wide estuaries; and when Nile inundates the land, so Memphis uses parched papyrus. Caesar's soldiers were ferried across in such craft, then trees were felled and quickly spanned the river, carrying the arches far into the fields, the bridge set distant from the river banks, for fear of its power when in full spate. Also to prevent the Sicoris boldly repeating its flooding, it was canalised, punished for

overflowing by having its course divided in channels. When Petreius saw how Caesar's destiny was carrying all before it, he abandoned Ilerda on its heights; wary of using existing resources, he sought dauntless tribes in unknown regions, whom contempt for death renders ever eager for battle, and headed for central Spain. Caesar, seeing the hills empty and the enemy camp deserted, told his men to arm and swim the river, without waiting to reach the bridge or fords. They obeyed, rushing into battle and therefore eager for a crossing they would have feared if retreating. Soon they dried themselves and, re-arming, marched quickly to warm their chilled bodies, until the time approached noon and the shadows grew shorter. Meanwhile the cavalry harassed the enemy rear, as the foe hesitated, uncertain whether to fight or flee.

#### **Book IV:157-207 A temporary peace**

Where a hollow valley lay between two rugged ridges that crossed the plain, the land rose in an unbroken range of high hills, among which a shadowy winding trail offered a safe and hidden passage. Caesar, seeing that the initiative would slip from his hands, if the foe reached that gorge, and be occupied by wild tribes from savage regions, cried: 'Break ranks and advance, regain the victory their flight has robbed you of; give battle with menace, fearful though they are, let them not die a coward's death, but meet your swords as they retreat.' As ordered, they overtook their enemies as they sought to win the mountain pass. There, both sides made camp, near each other, behind low ramparts. As gaze met gaze, uncloaked by distance, seeing each other's faces clearly, the horrors of civil war were brought home. For a time, discipline dictated silence, and they greeted friends there with a nod of the head or a lifted sword; but as soon as the stronger motivation of close affection weakened their

sense of duty, the men climbed their respective palisades, and stretched out their arms in embrace. One calls a friend by name, another greets his kinsman; shared memories of boyhood games prompt recognition of a face, and he who found no acquaintance opposite was no true Roman. Their weapons were wet with tears; sighs accompanied their embraces; and even when unstained by previous bloodshed, they shuddered at the thought of evil actions which if they had occurred might have involved them. 'Fools', conscience cried, 'why beat your chests, groan, and shed useless tears? Confess, you obey monstrous orders, of your own free will! Do you so fear a leader whom you alone make fearsome? When he sounds the battle trumpet, close your ears to its cruel note; refuse to advance beneath his standards, behold the fury of civil war will end in an instant, Caesar, a private citizen, will again befriend his son-in-law. Harmony, embrace us now in your eternal bond, be near us, you saviour of the world and all things, you bearer of sacred universal love! At this moment, our time can influence the future mightily, the cloak of evil is removed, the guilty nation has no excuse for these enemies recognise themselves as kinsmen. Cursed Fortune, whose malignant power employs this brief respite to render great evil even greater! There was peace, and enemies mingled together, wandering through either camp; they ate together in harmony, seated on the hard ground, and shared the flowing wine; fire burned on beds of turf, where lying side by side unsleeping they told tales of war all night, where they first fought, and how fiercely they had flung the javelin. But in boasting of their bravery, or in challenging the truth of others' tales, their friendship was strengthened, as fate designed, such that the coming evil seemed worse by contrast. For Petreius, learning of the fraternisation, seeing his camp infiltrated, infamously armed his slaves.

#### **Book IV:208-253 Petreius recalls his men to duty**

Surrounded by this force he drove the unarmed enemy soldiers from the camp, separating friends with swords, and shattering the peace with a fierce letting of blood, his ferocious anger prompting a speech to arouse war: ‘Soldiers, neglectful of your country, oblivious to your standards, if you, in the Senate’s cause, will not return as liberators, you should at least fight and be conquered. With swords in your hands, the outcome still uncertain, and blood in your veins to shed, will you serve a leader and carry standards you once opposed? Must Caesar be implored not to treat you as he does his other foes? Have you begged quarter for us generals too? Our lives will never be the prize, the payment for foul treason! It is not our lives we fight for in this civil war. Shall we be dragged to captivity in the name of a false peace? Men do not burrow deep to mine our iron ore, cities are not fortified with walls, spirited chargers are not bred for battle, nor are fleets launched and turreted vessels sent out on the seas, so that we can barter freedom for peace. My enemies hold true to oaths they swore, binding them to commit evil crimes; yet your allegiance is less firm, no doubt because, soldiers in a just cause, you might hope for pardon! Alas that honour should meet so vile an end! Our leader, Pompey, ignorant of his fate as yet, raises armies through the world, rouses kings who rule at the earth’s end, yet this peace of ours perhaps may already have thrown away his life.’ His words stunned them and re-awakened their sinful ardour. Likewise wild beasts that have lost their woodland habits, growing tame in close captivity, relinquish their cruel aspect and learn to submit to man; yet if their thirst is quenched with blood their furious rage returns, the taste reminding them of their past



life, their throats swelling, and their anger boiling, their frightened keeper scarcely winning free. So those soldiers set their hands to every guilty action, and the horrors that Fortune, to the gods' discredit, might have enacted in the blind obscurity of battle, loyalty perpetrated here. Among the couches, amid the tables, they pierced the breasts they had but now embraced, and though at first they groaned to bare their blades, yet once the sword, that counsellor of evil, was in their hand, they felt hatred for their friends, striking blows that confirmed their wavering purpose. The camp now seethed in uproar, and as if a crime hidden was valueless, they revealed every horror to the eyes of their officers, glorying in guilt.

#### **Book IV:254-318 Caesar lays siege to the enemy camp**

Though many of his troops were lost, Caesar recognised the hand of heaven; he was never more fortunate, neither in the Emathian Plain at Pharsalia, nor the sea-battle off Phocian Marseilles, nor was Pompey's death on Egypt's shores a greater triumph, for by this one act of civil war he was seen thereafter as the leader of the nobler cause. The enemy generals dared not allow their men, polluted by foul bloodshed, to camp nearby, but directed their retreat towards the walls of lofty Ilerda. Caesar's cavalry met them and drove them from the plain, trapping them amongst parched hills. Caesar then sought to surround them swiftly with a deep trench, so as to prevent the men from reaching the river banks, or their outworks from embracing flowing founts. When the enemy saw death before them, their fear was changed to impetuous ardour. Slaughtering their horses, useless to men besieged, they were forced to abandon hopes of flight, and rushed at the foe determined to win or die. Caesar seeing them committed to the advance, rushing towards their deaths at headlong speed, called to his men: 'Stand firm a while,

restrain from meeting with the sword all those who run towards it; let no man here lose his life; he who provokes his foe into giving up his life, gains victory at little cost. See these men come, despising life, holding theirs cheap, to burden me now with their deaths; oblivious to their wounds, they rush upon the sword, happy to shed their blood. Their wild ardour will abate, their mad eagerness cease, their will to die vanish.' By thus refusing battle, he allowed their waning threats to ebb away with the sun, night replacing its light with her own. Deprived of that opportunity to slay and be slain, their fire abated, their spirits cooled. So a wounded fighter has greater courage when wounds and pain are recent, while warm blood lends vigour to the body, before the skin has shrunk back across the bones; but if his opponent, knowing his blow sunk home, holds his ground but refrains from striking, a numbing chill gripping mind and flesh, as congealing blood tightens the open wound, robs the loser of his strength. Afterwards, short of water, the enemy began digging in search of hidden springs, and subterranean channels, using their swords as well as iron picks and rakes to pierce the ground, sinking wells through the earth to the depths of the moist plain. The pallid miner after Asturian gold does not delve as deep, leaving the light so far behind. But no sound of hidden streams met their ears, no fresh springs gushed from the echoing rock, no damp caves oozed scant moisture, no gravel stirred and lifted to a thin flowing thread. The men were hauled to the surface, exhausted by their intense effort to mine the flint; rendered by their search for water even less equipped to abide the heat and drought. Nor could they eat, and refresh their weak and weary bodies, all meat unpalatable while hungry they cried out from thirst. Wherever the soft soil oozed moisture they squeezed damp clods to their mouths. Wherever stagnant pools of black mud existed, caked with filth, men eagerly

lapped at the foul water, swallowing what they would have balked at if assured of staying alive; like wild beasts they sucked at the swollen udders of cows, draining blood from the empty teats if the milk failed, or they crushed grass and leaves to extract their sap, or the soft pith of trees, or drank dew from twigs, or brushed the damp from the green shoots of bushes.

#### **Book IV:319-362 Lucius Afranius surrenders**

Caesar had been free to lace with blood and bodies of wild beasts and with deadly aconite that grows in the rocks of Crete the Spanish streams, so that Pompey's soldiers drank unaware of the stratagem. O they seem fortunate whom a cruel foe, retreating, killed in the fields by poisoning the watercourses, for the survivors feel their innards scorched by fire, their mouths dry and hard, their scaled tongues coarse, their pulse drops and their lungs starved of moisture restrict the flow of breath, and what there is pains their cracked palates, yet still they pant eager for the air that hurts them. They long for rain, that rain which lately flooded the land, gazing at idle clouds. And to increase their torment through thirst, render them more wretched, their camp was not pitched above parched Meroe, on the tropic of Cancer, where the naked Garamentes live, but, besieged between the brimming Segre and the swift Ibro, the thirsting army saw both rivers near at hand. At last Pompey's generals, defeated, yielded; and Afranius, despairing of resistance, advised that terms be sought, led his weakened squadrons to the enemy camp, and stood a suppliant before Caesar. Yet he maintained his dignity, unbroken by disaster, with the bearing of a general though defeated, lapsed from his former fortune through recent evil chance, and his conscience at ease he

asked pardon: 'If I had lost to an unworthy enemy through fate, my own strong arm would have guaranteed my suicide; my sole reason for begging for my life, is that you, Caesar are worthy to grant it. We were not stirred by any partisanship; nor did we take up arms to oppose your plans. It was civil war that found us leaders, and we were loyal to our former duty, while that was possible. We shall not hinder destiny: we surrender the nations of the west to you, and open the gateway to the east, and leave you secure possession of the lands you leave behind. Your victory has not been gained in blood poured out on the field, nor by the sword wielded till arms were weary; forgive your foes this offence alone, that still you triumph over us. We ask little: only rest for the exhausted, and freedom from military service for those you let live. Consider our ranks as prostrate on the field; your captives should not share your triumph, warriors condemned by fate should not join their conquerors: my army has fulfilled its destiny, and we beg that you will not compel the conquered to seek victory under you.'

#### **Book IV:363-401 Pompey's army in Spain disbands**

So he spoke, and Caesar with a calm look readily agreed, excusing them from army service and from punishment. As soon as an appropriate peace treaty had been settled, the men rushed down unchecked to the rivers, lay down along the banks and muddied the streams freely. They gulped the water steadily, in draughts that prevented air passing to the lungs, constricting and blocking many a throat, nor did their parching thirst soon abate, but their craving sought still more even when the gut was filled. Soon though, their limbs gaining strength, the soldiers recovered. O luxury, prodigal of resources, only satisfied by what is dear; and you, with gourmet

appetites, eager for rare foods sought by land and sea,  
you who pride yourselves in feasting on delicacies,  
learn how little is needed to sustain life, how little  
nature herself demands. It takes no famous vintage,  
sealed in the year of some long-forgotten consul,  
to restore these to health; revived by pure water,  
and not imbibed from gold or agate vessels; pure  
flowing water and Ceres' bread suffice mankind.  
Abandoning their arms to the victor, secure now  
though stripped of their defensive armour, free  
from care and inoffensive, they are set at liberty  
among their native townships, regretting, now  
that they enjoy the gift of peace, that they ever  
hurled the spear with vigorous arm, suffered  
thirst, or begged the gods, wrongly, for victory.  
Alas for those who still wage war! Such battles  
with uncertain outcome lie ahead for the victors!  
Even if Fortune, arbitrary in her favours, fails  
to desert them, they must yet go on fighting,  
shedding their blood everywhere, following  
Caesar's destiny. Happy these others who,  
while all the world is tumbling about them,  
already know the place where they may rest.  
No battles will call them from their sanctuary;  
no sounds of trumpets will shatter their sleep.  
Their wives and babes, their simple dwellings,  
their native soil not some colony, receive them.  
Fortune relieves them of another burden too;  
their minds are free of all allegiance: if Pompey  
was their leader, Caesar grants them their lives.  
They alone are the fortunate spectators of this  
civil war, free of the wish for either's success.

#### **Book IV:402-447 Conflict in Dalmatia**

The fortunes of war were not all in Caesar's favour daring to work against him in one instance. Where the Adriatic waves beat against the straggling city of Salona (Solin), where the mild Jadro runs to meet the soft westerlies, there Gaius Antonius relying on the warlike islanders of Curicta, who live encircled by the Adriatic waters, was besieged in his camp on the island's shore, safe against attack if he could keep famine, taker of impregnable fortresses, at bay. The earth yielded nothing to feed the horses, golden Ceres gave no crops, and the soldiers had stripped the fields of grass, cropping the blades close with their teeth, tearing dried tufts from their ramparts. When they saw Basilus with an allied force, nearby on the mainland, they devised a novel way to cross the strait and join him. Unable to employ their usual vessels, the long ships with their high sterns, they lashed stout timbers together to carry their weight, rafts made out of planks resting on double rows of empty barrels linked by chains. The oarsmen were protected against missiles against their sides by defensive shields of wood, striking the waves behind these, so that the rafts, carrying no sail and without signs of flailing oars, seemed to move mysteriously. Waiting till the tide was in full ebb and the sands left bare by the receding flow, three rafts were launched from the exposed shore into the retreating waters, the leader driving onwards through the waves, with her consorts behind her. Each carried wooden battlements and high turrets, nodding and menacing. Octavius, who held access to the Adriatic, stooped short of attacking the rafts, curbing his swift vessels until the enemy ventured others, tempted by first success. Once they set out on their rash attempt, he left the sea roads wide open

to encourage a second voyage. So the hunter works, holding back the net of coloured feathers that scares the deer with its scent, till he can pen them all, or quieting the noise of the swift Molossian hounds, leashing the dogs of Crete and Sparta, till he has set his stakes and nets, leaving one hound alone to range the ground, it puzzling out the scent and only barking when the prey is found, content then to point toward the creature's lair while tugging at the leash. Soon more rafts were manned, and the enemy embarked eagerly, abandoning the island, at the moment when twilight lingering holds off night's deeper darkness.

#### **Book IV:448-528 An incident at sea**

Now the Cilicians in Pompey's pay, relying on their ancient cunning, prepared to set a trap for the rafts. They hung cables at mid-depth below the surface, fastened to the cliffs on the Illyrian side, and allowed them to drift with the waves. Neither of the first two rafts were caught, but the third was held and drawn towards the cliffs as the cable tightened. The rocks there overhang the waves, in firm masses that seem ever about to fall, their trees overshadowing the sea. And there ships wrecked by the northerlies, with their crews of drowned sailors, were often carried by the tide, to be swallowed by hidden caves: and yet whenever the tide ebbed from those caves, the waters beneath would cast out their prey, the boiling waves outdoing the fury of Sicilian Charybdis. Here the raft floated, weighed down with Caesar's men from Opitergium, surrounded by enemy ships loosed from their moorings, while others of their foes covered the cliffs and shore. Vulteius the raft's commander tried in vain to cut free from the cables visible below the water, until at last he called on his men to fight without hope of escape, or even of knowing on which side to await attack.

Yet even so courage did all that courage can do  
when at a disadvantage, and a fight began between  
the thousands who swarmed around the stalled raft  
and those on board, numbering less than six hundred.  
As twilight ebbed with the shadows of night, the fight  
ended, and the ensuing darkness brought a brief truce.  
Vulteius steadied his men, fearful of death's approach,  
with this noble speech: 'Soldiers, use this brief space  
of time, this little interval of darkness, to choose your  
path, in extremity. No instant is too short for a man  
to kill himself; suicide is no less glorious when death  
at another's hand approaches. Every man's span of life  
being uncertain, it is as well for the mind to forfeit here  
the mere moment of time that remains to you as long  
years of life you had hoped for, seeking death by your  
own actions: for no man wishes for death involuntarily.  
Flight is not an option, our countrymen surround us  
eager to take our lives: choose death and lose all fear:  
let each man make whatever cannot be avoided his aim.  
Yet we are not forced to die in the blind mist of battle,  
where army's own missiles cloak chaos with darkness.  
When piles of corpses heap the field, each death is lost  
in the common disaster, courage obscured and wasted.  
But the gods have set us here, visible to friend and foe  
alike, the sea our witness, the island, its highest cliffs;  
and the two sides on opposing headlands will look on.  
Fate intends, by our deaths, a memorable and glorious  
example for posterity. Our company might have shown  
our loyalty and devotion in battle, and beyond all others.  
Yet though we know it is all too little for Caesar's men  
to fall on their swords in his cause, hemmed in as we are  
we can grant him no greater pledge of our great devotion.  
Fate has greatly limited our glory, in begrudging to hold  
us captive with our old men and our sons, but let the foe  
learn that we are unconquerable, let them fear the fierce  
courage that embraces death; and rejoice that no more  
of our rafts are held. They will tempt us now with offers



of a truce, try dishonourably to bribe us with our lives.  
Let them promise pardons, let them foster such hopes,  
so that our peerless deaths might gain greater glory,  
and they not think us desperate when hot steel pierces.  
It takes a great deed of courage for Caesar, who loses  
thousands, to call a mere handful of lives a vast loss.  
If Fate now allowed our retreat and loosed me from  
her grasp, I should refuse to turn my back on this.  
Life is behind me, comrades, and I am driven by  
thoughts of death's approach as by deep passion.  
Only those who touch its threshold know death  
is a blessing; the gods hide it from those destined  
to survive, that they might go on living.' His words  
filled the soldiers' swelling hearts with noble ardour.  
Before his speech they had gazed weeping at the stars  
trembling as the pole of the Wain circled above them,  
but now their thoughts firm, filled with his exhortation,  
they longed for dawn. Nor did the stars overhead take  
long to vanish, for the sun was leaving Gemini, his track  
near its highest inclination, entering the sign of Cancer;  
while Sagittarius the Archer ruled brief brooding night.

#### **Book IV:529-581 Vulteius and his men commit suicide**

Dawn revealed Pompey's Histrians stationed on the cliffs,  
and his fierce Liburnians with the Greek fleet on the sea.  
They delayed attack, trying to obtain their foe's surrender,  
thinking a death postponed might make life seem sweeter  
to those on the trapped raft. But the loyal troops resisted:  
disdain for survival granting courage, committed to suicide,  
they were indifferent to the outcome of the fight: no noise  
of battle could dissuade them from their resolution: their  
small band, prepared for the worst, withstood the countless  
enemies who attacked them together from land and sea,  
so great is a resolve inspired by the prospect of death.  
When they thought enough blood had been shed in battle,  
they turned their force against themselves. First Vulteius

their captain, bared his throat and summoned death: 'Where is the soldier worthy to take my blood, who shall truly prove his wish for death by killing me?' Before he could speak again, his body was pierced by a host of swords, but while thanking all, in his gratitude he slew in dying him to whom he owed the first wound. The others then met together, there the horror of civil war was enacted in full by a single party. So Theban warriors rose from the seed that Cadmus sowed, and were likewise slain by their kin, a dismal presage of the royal Theban brothers. So, by the Phasis, the offspring of Earth, who sprang from the teeth of the unsleeping dragon, drenched the long furrows in each other's blood, magic spells filling them with fury, Medea herself appalled by that crime, the first wrought by her untried herbs. So these soldiers died, on oath to destroy each other; their own death being the least their courage asked: as they dealt the fatal wound so they incurred it, at the same moment, and no right arm failed them though it struck in death. Nor were their wounds all owing to a sword-blow; they drove their own chests against the steel, throats meeting the approach of the blade. Though bloody fate set brother against brother, son against father, their arms never hesitated, driving home the swords with all their power. Only the failure to strike a second blow gave proof of the slayer's affection. Half-dead, men dragged themselves along the planks and drenched the sea with blood. They gloried in disdain for the light of life, eyeing the victors with scornful gaze, as death approached. When the raft was piled high with their corpses, the victors set fire to that funeral pyre, the generals amazed at their readiness to die for their leader they so clearly prized. Fame, that travels the wide earth, never voiced more loudly the glory of any death at sea. Yet even after the example set by such heroes, nations of cowards still do not comprehend how simple it is to escape captivity by suicide; so the tyrant's power is feared, freedom is constrained by savage weapons, while all remain ignorant that the sword is there to deliver every man from slavery. O, that death were only granted to the brave, the coward denied a swift release from life!

#### **Book IV:582-660 The myth of Hercules and Antaeus**

The flames of war burned no less fiercely in Libya, then, for bold Curio's fleet had set sail from the coast of Sicily, and a gentle northerly filled the sails, till he approached a noted anchorage on the Libyan coast between Cape Bon and the ruins of Carthage. He pitched his first camp some distance from the breaking waves, where the Bagra river (the Medjerda) carves its slow channel through thirsty sands. From there he marched to the rocky prominence, hollowed out on every side, that tradition rightly calls Antaeus' realm. When Curio sought to learn the source of the ancient name, a rough countryman told him the tale generations had told: even after the Giants were born of her, Earth was capable of childbearing, producing a dread offspring in a cave in Libya, with more cause to boast of him than of Typhon, Tityos or fierce Briareus, and to the gods above it seemed a mercy she had not born him before that revolt at Phlegra. She added to her child's vast strength, granting him the gift that when his limbs touched his mother earth, all weariness would vanish and their strength would be renewed. The cave there was his home; and men said he hid beneath the cliffs above, and ate the flesh of the lions he hunted. When he slept, his bed was not branches and the pelts of wild beasts, rather he lay there on the bare ground and so refreshed his strength. He killed the farmers in the Libyan fields, and slew strangers the sea brought ashore; and had long found his mother's aid unnecessary, not needing the aid that touching the earth gave, since he proved so strong no one could lift him from his feet. The hero Hercules was clearing the land and sea of monsters when reports of this bloody ogre drew him to Libya's shores. Challenging Antaeus, Hercules threw the Nemean lion's skin to the ground, while Antaeus matched it with a Libyan lion's. The hero, in the manner of Olympian wrestlers drenched his limbs with oil; Antaeus, not content with feet alone touching his mother earth, poured warm sand over his limbs to aid him.

They locked hands and twined their arms in a close embrace; in vain, exerting powerful force, each tried to bow the other's neck, but both remained unbent with steady gaze, marvelling to find their equal. Hercules slowly wore down his opponent, not wishing to exert his full strength so early in the contest; and soon Antaeus was left gasping, cold sweat pouring from his tiring body. The neck bowed, the frame was dragged down, the legs staggered, as Hercules struck his flanks with his fists. Then the stronger grasped his foe's bending back, gripped the loins and squeezed the waist tight, his own legs thrusting the other's apart, till he laid him full length on the ground. Yet as the dry soil swiftly drank his sweat, fresh blood filled Antaeus' veins, his muscles swelled, his body strengthened, and he loosened Hercules' grip by exerting renewed powers. The latter was astonished by such resilience: he himself had felt, all unknowing, less fear of the Hydra by Inachus' flow, when her snake-heads renewed after being severed. These opponents were well-matched, though Antaeus fought with the power of mother earth, Hercules his own strength alone. Never was his cruel stepmother, Hera, more hopeful of his defeat, seeing his body weary with the toil, shoulders bowed, those shoulders that once supported the sky without effort. Hercules grappled once more with his foe till he wearied; but Antaeus willingly fell to earth without waiting for his opponent's clasp, and rose again filled with added strength. All the vital powers of the earth refreshed his tired limbs; Earth herself labouring to aid in her son's wrestling match. Seeing at last how his enemy was helped by contact with his mother earth, Hercules cried: 'I must keep you upright, I'll not allow you to lie down, or entrust you to the soil; here you will stay locked in my embrace; and if you fall, Antaeus, you'll fall on me!' So saying, Hercules lifted the giant high as he tried to touch the ground, so Earth could not strengthen her dying son's frame with her own. Hercules, between the two, clasped the constricted chest already growing cold, long denying his foe the ground. Hence that region took its name, preserved by tradition

which values the proud past. But Scipio brought greater fame to those heights, when he drove Hannibal there from the cities of Latium; camping there on reaching the Libyan shore. There are the ruins of his ancient ramparts; the fields that victorious Roman occupied.

#### **Book IV:661-714 Pompey's African army under Varus**

Those parts of Africa which had yielded to Roman arms were commanded at that time by Varus; and though he relied on troops from Latium, he summoned the forces of King Juba from every place, from the Libyan tribes, and those from the furthest parts who followed the king. There was no more extensive realm on earth; its width bounded to the west by Atlas near Gades, on the east by Ammon, bordering Syrtes; and lengthwise the fiery regions of his huge kingdom separated the torrid zones from the northern sea. The men reflected that vast space; a host of tribes following the king; Autololes, wandering Numidians, and alert Gaetulians, who ride bare-backed; then Moors dark as Indians, ragged Nasamonians, swift Marmaridae, and sun-burned Garamantes; the Mazaces hurling quivering javelins to match a Parthian's arrows, and Massylians who also ride bare-backed and employ a light whip to guide their horses, unbroken to the bit; African hunters too, who stray through deserted villages, and placing little faith in the spear, strangle fierce lions with lengths of their robes. Juba was not roused to war simply by his allegiance, but yielded to personal anger too, since Curio, in the year when he was tribune, when he offended heaven and earth, had tried to use the law to rob Juba of his ancestral throne, wishing to seize Africa from its ruler and at the same time set up a king in Rome. Juba, remembering this grievance, considered civil war was his opportunity for revenge on rescuing his crown, and Curio was now alarmed by the rumour of the king's involvement, knowing his troops had not at first rallied

to Caesar's side. No veterans, so, untested on the Rhine, they had surrendered the citadel of Corfinium; disloyal to Pompey's cause then, they were distrusted by Curio now, as men who thought it fine to fight for either side. So when Curio saw the enervation produced by fear, the dereliction that left the ramparts unwatched at night, troubled in mind, he spoke these thoughts to himself: 'Daring conceals the greatest fear; I will take the field first. Let my soldiers, while they are still mine, descend to the plain; inactivity always leads to wavering. Let me by action rob them of the power to foment a plan; once the sword is grasped, fatal passions rise, and the helm hiding all blushes who thinks to compare their leaders and weigh their causes? Each favours the side where he stands. So those presented at the gladiatorial shows in the arena, are not fed by some deep-seated anger, they merely hate whoever is set against them.' Then Curio deployed his troops on the open plain, while the gods of war seemed to welcome him, although intending only to betray him to future ruin; for now he drove Varus from the field, decimating his army who fled shamefully, halting only on reaching camp.

#### **Book IV:715-787 Juba's army defeats Curio**

Now when Juba heard of Varus' poor showing in battle, he rejoiced that the glory of the campaign was reserved for him. He marched swiftly and secretly, avoiding his movement being known by enforcing silence, his only fear lest his incautious enemy might be fearful of him. Sabbura, second to the king in command of the army, was dispatched with a small force to challenge the foe and tempt them to fight. He was to pretend to lead out the whole army, and simulate the main attack, while the king held back a larger force, in a deep ravine. So the more cunning Egyptian mongoose uses his tail to deceive the snake, rousing the reptile to anger with

its flickering shadow, the snake striking vainly at the air, till the creature, holding his head aslant, grips the throat, and safely bites there, far enough from the deadly venom; until a stream of poison flows from the thwarted fangs. Fortune favoured Juba's deceit, and bold Curio let his cavalry roam the plain at night, ranging far and wide through unfamiliar country, without being able to gauge the enemy's hidden strength. At the first breath of dawn he sent out his infantry, though warned again and again to beware of Libyan cunning, and how Punic warfare was ever filled with guile. The doom of approaching death had given the general over to destruction; now civil war was claiming one who'd aided its inception. He had led his men by a perilous path over the steep rocks and cliffs, till the enemy could be seen far off, from the heights. The foe with native cunning, held off a while, till Curio should leave the hills and trust his army to defile over the open plain. He, unaware of their hidden plans, and thinking them in retreat, marched his men down to the fields, as if victorious. Soon the stratagem was revealed, as the Numidian light cavalry gained the slopes and then surrounded the Romans on every side, stunning the soldiers and their leader alike: the coward did not seek to flee nor the brave man to fight. For there the horses, un-roused by the trumpet's blare, did not champ the bit or scatter stones with their stamping hooves, mane floating, ears erect, or chafe at the restraint and shift their ground with a clatter, till the bowed head sinks, the limbs reek with sweat, the tongue protrudes, the mouth coarse and dry, the lungs panting roughly breath labouring as the spent flanks work, and froth cakes and dries on the blood-stained bit. They refused to move a step, though urged on by whips and blows, and the force of continual spurring to drive them on; though no man could profit there by conquering his mount's resistance, for no attack was possible, any charge would only carry

the rider nearer the foe, to offer a clear mark for a spear. But as soon as the African skirmishers launched their steeds at them, the plain shook with that trampling, the soil was ploughed, and a pillar of dust rose, huge as that whirled by a Thracian storm, veiling the sky with its cloud and bringing darkness. Now the sad doom of war bore down on the Roman infantrymen. the issue never in doubt, this not even war's lottery, for every moment of conflict was filled with death: with no possibility of attack or closing with the foe. So the soldiers, surrounded on every side, fell to sideways thrusts from close quarters, as well as to spears flung from a distance, doomed by the bloody wounds inflicted by a hail of missiles and the sheer weight of steel. The vast army was driven into a tiny space, and any man crawling in fear among that host could barely move without hurt from his comrades' swords, the crush growing greater as the front ranks retreated, diminishing the circle. Without space even to deploy their weapons, the crowd of soldiers were squeezed ever tighter, armour dented by the pressure. The conquering Moors could scarcely enjoy a clear view of the victory fate granted them, unable to see collapsing limbs, bodies striking the ground, streams of blood, as the dead were held upright by the throng.

#### **Book IV:788-824 The spectre of corruption**

Destiny should have recalled to life the hated ghost of dread Carthage to joy in such sacrificial slaughter; so that blood-drenched Hannibal and the Punic dead might welcome so terrible an expiation. What outrage, you gods, that Pompey's cause and the Senate's wish should be furthered by Roman dead on Libya's soil. Let Africa at least conquer us for her own foul ends! Curio, seeing the ranks destroyed, the dust laid by the blood revealing that dreadful slaughter, did not



stoop to thoughts of flight or surviving such defeat  
but eager to face death, brave with the courage of  
despair, himself died among the corpses of his men.  
What good was it now to him to have raised that stir  
on the Rostrum, in the tribunes' stronghold the Forum,  
where he raised the standard of the people, and from  
which he roused the nations to arms? What good now  
that he usurped the Senate's rights and called on  
Pompey and Caesar, Pompey's father-in-law, to meet  
in war? There he lay, as the two generals approached  
the fatal field of Pharsalia, that spectacle of civil war  
denied him. Such is the penalty of blood and steel,  
you great ones exact on your wretched country; so  
death atones for conflict. How fortunate were Rome,  
how happy her citizens, if the gods were as careful  
to preserve her freedom as they are to avenge its loss.  
Behold, the unburied corpse of Curio, noble carrion,  
feeds the Libyan vultures. And yet it would be wrong  
to deny those deeds of his preserved from time's  
decay by their own worth: we should grant praise  
to what in his life deserved it, for Rome never bore  
a man of such great promise, nor one to whom while  
he trod the true path, the constitution itself owed more.  
But the corruption of our age proved fatal to the State,  
ambition, luxury, the vast power of wealth, sweeping  
away in their adverse currents, the frail foundations  
on which Curio's principles rested. When he yielded  
to Caesar's gold, to the proceeds of Gaul, his change  
of stance swayed the scales of history. Though mighty  
Sulla, bold Marius, bloodstained Cinna, all Caesar's  
line won the power to use the blade to cut our throats,  
to which of them was granted privilege so great as to  
enact it? They only bought their country; Curio sold it!

#### **End of Book IV**

## **Book V:1-70 Lentulus addresses the senators**

So the two leaders in turn suffered the vicissitudes of war, and their mixed fortunes saw them still equal in strength as the encounter of Pharsalia drew closer. Winter had now sprinkled Mount Haemus with snow, and the Pleiades, daughters of Atlas, were already setting in wintry skies. The New Year was approaching, that day on the calendar when the rites of Janus, ruler of the months, commence. Before the last days of their office ended, the two consuls, Marcellus and Lentulus, summoned those senators, now dispersed on military duties, to Epirus, where a lowly room received the great men of Rome, and under an alien roof the Senate convened to conduct the business of the State, for who could call the place, with all those rods and axes there by law, a mere military camp? The venerable body showed the world that they were not the party of Pompey, but that they were in many respects in Pompey's favour. As soon as the gloomy gathering fell silent, Lentulus rose from his high seat and spoke in a noble manner: 'Senators, if you have firm hearts worthy of your Latin stock and ancient lineage, take no note of this place where we meet, or the distance separating us from occupied Rome, but rather recognising the composition of this body, and its power to adopt any measure, decree, as is clear to all the nations, that we are indeed the Senate. For wherever fate leads us, whether beneath the northern Bear and the icy Wain, or the equator oppressed by heat where night and day are ever equal, we are the State, and Empire attends us. When the Tarpeian sanctuary was burnt by the Gauls, Camillus had his seat at Veii, and Veii was Rome. This house never forfeits its rights simply by a change of location. Caesar may have power over the empty buildings, the deserted rooms, the silent law courts, and the law in dismal recess; but there are no senators in his Senate House except those expelled before Rome was deserted: every member of this great

body is present except those who are now exiles, there. We were driven asunder at first, by the onset of war, after long peace free from civil conflict, but now all the scattered members return to the body. See how the gods repair the loss of Italy with forces drawn from the whole world! Enemies of ours lie drowned In Illyrian depths, while Curio, that man of power in Caesar's senate, is dead in the barren sands of Libya. Raise your standards, generals, speed fate's course, show the gods your confidence, and take courage from the success the rightness of your cause granted when you fled Caesar. The period of office conferred on us, your consuls, expires with the year's ending, but your authority, senators, is free of limits, so take counsel for us all and vote for Pompey as our leader!' The sound of that name was applauded by the throng, and they laid on Pompey's shoulders the burden of their own and their country's fate. Then they granted rewards of merit to kings and peoples: gifts of honour were conferred on the tough soldiers of chilly Taygetus, and on Rhodes, the queen of the seas, Apollo's island; Athens of ancient fame was commended, and Phocaea given its freedom, as Marseilles was, its daughter city; King Sadalas was praised and loyal Cotys, Deiotarus and Rhascypolis the lord of frozen wastes, while Libya by order of the Senators was bound to obey King Juba. O cruel fate, next Ptolemy, worthy indeed to rule over a faithless people, Ptolemy, Fortune's shame, the gods reproach, was permitted the burden of Egypt's crown, and a boy received the sword to use ruthlessly against his people: would that his people alone had suffered! He was granted the throne, Cleopatra lost her realm, and Caesar the guilt for the murder of his son-in-law. Then the Senate dispersed and took up arms again. Yet while nations and their leaders prepared for war, ignorant of the future and blind to their fate, Appius Claudius alone, feared to trust an unknown outcome,

and called on the gods to reveal things yet to come,  
unbarring the Delphic shrine of Apollo, long closed.

### **Book V:71-101 The Shrine of Apollo at Delphi**

Between the bounds of east and west, the twin peaks  
of Parnassus tower to the heavens. The mountain  
is sacred to Apollo and Dionysus, in whose honour  
the Theban Bacchantes, honouring the two deities  
as one, hold their triennial festival there, at Delphi.  
When the Flood drowned the Earth, this mountain  
alone rose above the waves, and was all that parted  
sea from sky. Parnassus' peaks were differentiated  
even so by the waters, one rocky summit on display  
the other one submerged. There Apollo, his skills  
as yet un-honed, killed the Python with his arrows,  
avenging his mother who had been driven out when  
pregnant. Themis once ruled that shrine and oracle.  
Thus Apollo, hearing the deep chasm in the earth  
breathe out divine truth, exhale prophetic words,  
enshrined himself in the sacred cavern, brooded  
over the sanctuary, and there became prophetic.  
What deity is indeed hidden there? What power  
from the sky deigns to exist confined in those  
dark caves? What god of heaven suffers earth's  
weight, knows every secret of eternity's course,  
aware of the world's futurity, ready to reveal  
its presence to the nations, and endure contact  
with humankind? A great and mighty power,  
whether the utterance it produces determines  
fate, or whether it merely voices destiny.  
Perhaps a large portion of the divine itself,  
embedded in the world to rule it, supporting  
the globe balanced in empty space, emerges  
in the Delphic cave and is enshrined there,  
linked with the Thunderer in heaven. When  
inspiration strikes a virgin priestess, it sounds

forcibly within the human spirit, and frees  
her voice, as Sicilian Etna's summit erupts  
from the pressure within; or as Typhoeus  
heats the Campanian rock with his stirring,  
where he lies forever beneath Ischia's mass.

### **Book V:102-140 Appius Claudius reopens the shrine**

That shrine, welcoming all and denied to none,  
is alone free from the taint of human passions.  
There no evil prayers are uttered in secretive  
whispers, for the oracle, sure and immutable,  
forbids mortals all further requests. It favours  
the righteous, as in the case of Tyre, when  
whole cities were abandoned by the people,  
showing them a place to dwell; or, as Salamis  
commemorates, taught others how to dispel  
the clouds of war; or revealed a remedy for  
earth's barrenness, or cleared the air of plague.  
No divine gift is more dearly missed now  
than that Delphian oracle which fell silent  
when kings grew so afraid of the future  
they forbade the heavenly utterance. Yet  
the Delphic priestesses did not mourn their  
loss, and delighted in the shrine's neglect;  
for if the god enters her breast, an untimely  
death is a priestess's reward, her penalty,  
for having so received him, since the human  
body is destroyed by the dart and pulse of  
that frenzy; frail life is eroded by the blow.  
The great cave had long been silent, its tripods  
had long been untended, when Appius sought  
his goal, to probe the future destiny of Rome.  
Phemonoe, the priestess, was idly wandering  
beside the Castalian spring, in the quiet grove,  
when Appius ordered the high priest to unbar  
the holy shrine and usher the terrified priestess

into the god's presence. He laid hands on her, and forced her towards the doors of the temple. Fearing to cross that dread threshold, Apollo's priestess sought in vain, by deceiving Appius, to discourage his eagerness to learn the future. 'What perverse hope of knowledge draws you here, Roman? Parnassus' mute chasm remains silent, hiding its god. The breath of inspiration fails of outlet here, finding a path in some other place; or when the barbarians set fire to Delphi the ashes filled the deep caverns and now block Apollo's passage; or Delphi is dumb at heaven's command, and it is thought sufficient that those Sibylline leaves entrusted to your nation reveal the hidden future; or perhaps Apollo, determined to exclude the guilty from his shrine finds none in this age worthy of opening his closed lips.'

#### **Book V:141-197 The priestess prophecies**

The virgin's guile was obvious, even her fear proved the presence of the power she denied. As she hesitated and malingered, the priest thrust her forcefully into the shrine, the sacred ribbon circling and confining the tresses above her brow, the hair that streamed down her back bound by white ribbon and the laurel of Phocis. Still she halted beyond the entrance, dreading the oracle's recess, the inner cave, pretending to inspiration, mimicking the prophetic words from her unmoved breast, no inarticulate cries of dim utterance revealing a mind inspired by divine frenzy. She did more harm to the oracle and Apollo's repute than to Appius, to whom she chanted false prophecy, for her utterance devoid of tremulous cries, lacking the power to fill the cave's vast space; the laurel wreath

not lifting from a head of bristling hair; those stones of the temple unshaken, trees unmoved, arose from fear of entrusting herself to Apollo, and Appius finding the tripods mute, cried out in fury: 'Impious woman, I and the power you mimic will punish you as you deserve, if you refuse to enter these depths, and still insist on uttering only your own words as to the vast conflicts of a fearful world.' Cowering, at last, the virgin fled to the tripods and, drawing near the vast abysses, hung there, her breast filling with the powers of the rocky cave, the divine inspiration urged on her, a force not exhausted by the centuries. Finally, Apollo had mastered the Delphian priestess's body as fully as ever, entering within, dispelling her own thoughts, commanding her human self to yield its frame to him. Possessed she flung herself wildly about the cavern, tossing her head, whirling Apollo's ribbons and garlands dislodged by her bristling hair through the shrine's empty void, scattering the tripods obstructing her errant course, as she burned with a fierce flame, enduring your anger Phoebus. Nor did you use whip and spur alone, darting flame at her vital organs; she suffered the curb as well, not permitted to reveal all that she knew. All time was gathered up as one mass, all the centuries pressed on her wretched breast, the chain of events so revealed, that all futures struggled to the light, fates contending seeking a voice; nor was the first day of the world, nor its last, nor the Ocean's ends, nor the number of the grains of desert sand lacking. Just as the Cumaean Sibyl, jealous lest her inspiration be at the service of too many nations, chose, in her Euboean cave, to utter Rome's destiny, picking with haughty hand among the vast heap

of fates, so now Phemonoe, possessed by Apollo, seeking the name of Appius hidden among those of greater men, that Appius who came to question the god hidden in Castalia's earth, laboured long. Then, finding it, the wild frenzy escaped foaming lips, groaning she uttered high inarticulate cries with panting breath; then a dismal wailing filled the deep cave, and when she was finally mastered once more, the priestess gave voice: 'Roman, you will take no part in this great convulsion, you will escape the endless dangers of war, you will remain in peace in a hollow cleft on the Euboean shore.' Then Apollo closed her throat, cutting short her tale.

### **Book V:198- 236 The fate of Appius**

You tripods, keepers of fate, you arcane mysteries of the universe, and you Apollo, the power of truth, from whom the heavens conceal no future day, why did you fear to reveal the imminent ruin of empire, the fall of captains, the destruction of kings, the ruin of so many nations in that carnage that was Italy? Had the gods not yet resolved on so great an evil, was the fate of a vast multitude in doubt because the stars hesitated to condemn Pompey to death? Or was the purpose of your silence that destiny might complete the work of a liberating blade, wild ambition yet be punished, and tyranny meet the vengeance of a Brutus once more? But now the doors burst open as the priestess dashed her breast against them, and driven from the temple she escaped; although the frenzy lasted, the god whom she could not evade controlled her still, her tale not yet told. Her eyeballs rolled wildly, her gaze roaming the sky, her restless features showing now fear and now menacing grimaces. A hectic flush mingled with the leaden pallor



of her cheeks, a pallor unlike fear but inspiring  
dread, her pounding heart unstill, voiceless sighs  
troubling her breast, like a swollen sea moaning  
hoarsely, when the north wind ceases to blow.  
As she recovered the light of everyday, after  
that divine radiance in which fate had been  
revealed, a darkness fell, since Apollo poured  
the Stygian waters of Lethe into her inner self,  
snatching the secrets of the heavens from her.  
Then truth fled her breast, while the visions  
of the future were hidden in Apollo's tripods,  
and there she fell, recovering only at length.  
While Appius, deceived by the oracle's words,  
urged on by hope, and unaware of approaching  
death, was eager, while command of the earth  
was still uncertain, to stake a claim in Euboean  
Chalcis. Ah, fool! What deity can grant a man  
shall evade the effects of war, or escape such  
world-wide suffering, apart from Death alone?  
Laid in a noted sepulchre there you will occupy  
a sequestered spot on Euboea's shore, where  
an arm of the sea winds narrowly twixt Carystos'  
quarries, by Rhamnus that worships Nemesis,  
she who hates the proud, there where the tide's  
flowing waters seethe in the narrows, where  
the straits of Euripus, a flux of waters, bear  
Chalcis' ships to Aulis, unkind to alien fleets.

#### **Book V:237-299 Caesar's troops on the verge of mutiny**

Meanwhile Caesar, returning in triumph from  
conquered Spain, preparing to carry the eagles  
to a new sphere of action, found the current of  
his success almost turned aside by the gods.  
Unbeaten in the field, the general feared to lose  
the fruits of his ill deeds within his own camp,  
when the troops loyal to him in so many wars

now sated with killing came close to mutiny; whether the brief pause in the trumpets' sad notes, the cooling of blades in their sheaths tempered the dark spirit of war, or greed for greater pay tempted men to deny their leader and his cause, and offer their swords, already tainted with crime, once more for hire, no peril taught Caesar more clearly how fragile and unstable was the height from which he gazed down on all the world, how unsound the soil he stood on, that quaked beneath him. Denied the service of so many, almost left to his own devices, he who drove so many nations to war learned that the drawn sword belongs to no general but the soldier alone. Here was an end to muttered complaint, to anger concealed deep in the heart, for that which often counters a wavering allegiance, that each man fears his fellows to whom he is a threat, and each thinks he alone resents the injustice of tyranny, such motives lost their hold. The weight of numbers dispelled their fears, making them bold; so the sins of the many often go unpunished. Complaints poured forth: 'Caesar, let us quit this madness of civil war. Through land and sea you seek more enemies to pierce us, ready to spill our lives unvalued at the hand of any foe. Some of us slain in Gaul, others in the hard fighting in Spain; others lie behind in Italy; throughout the world your victories mean soldiers perish. What use to have shed our blood in the north, victorious beside the Rhone and Rhine? Your reward to us for such campaigns is civil war. What spoils exist from driving out the Senate, from taking Rome, our native city, what men or gods might we rob? Though our hands, our

blades, are tainted as we pursue every form of crime, our poverty must absolve us. What end to warfare do you seek? What can satisfy you if Rome does not suffice? See our grey hairs, behold our feeble bodies, our weakened grip. Passing all our years in fighting, we have lost the joys of life. Let us disband, now we are old, and die. Is that so terrible a demand: let us not lay our limbs in death on the bitter ramparts, or breathe our last breath through helmet bars; but look for a hand to close our eyes in death, sink into the arms of a weeping wife, and know the pyre stands ready for the one corpse alone. Let sickness end old age, not death by the sword be the only fate for Caesar's soldiers. Why lure us on with promises, as if we were yet ignorant of the horrors we shall commit? Are we the only ones in this civil war who fail to see what crime would earn the greatest reward? All our warfare has been in vain if Caesar has yet to learn our hands compass every deed. Neither our oaths, nor the bonds of law forbid our boldness: though Caesar was my general on the Rhine, he is my comrade here; crime makes equal those it stains. Our courage too is unvalued if the judge of worth shows no gratitude; all our efforts are called luck. Let Caesar learn we forge his fate; though he may hope for the gods' indulgence, it is his soldiers' wrath that will bring peace.' So saying, they ran about the camp, demanding the general, anger in their faces. So be it, you gods, when duty, loyalty are no more, and evil deeds are our only hope, why then let mutiny bring an end to civil war!

### **Book V:300-373 He quells the mutiny**

Many a general would have feared such tumult,

but Caesar was accustomed to stake his fortune  
on desperate measures, glad to put it to the proof  
in extremis, without waiting for the anger to abate  
he approached them eager to counter a rising fury.  
Unrestrained by him they were ready to sack cities,  
Jupiter's Tarpeian temple itself, and inflict outrage  
on the mothers and daughters of senators; he only  
demanded they sought his leave for every savagery,  
that they yearn for the spoils of war alone, fearing  
his wild soldiery should they return to their senses.  
(Shame on you, Caesar! You alone delight in a war  
your own men condemn! They sicken of bloodshed  
before you do, resenting the tyranny of the sword,  
while you run beyond all good and evil. Wearied  
of it, learn to suffer a life without conflict, allow  
yourself to set an end to wickedness. Ruthless man,  
why this compulsion, this pressure on men who  
no longer wish to fight? Civil war is slipping from  
your grasp.) Now he took his stand on a tall mound  
of turf, his face calm, his fearlessness inspiring fear  
in others, his anger dictating the words he uttered:  
'You soldiers, who railed against me in my absence,  
with angry looks and gestures, here is my bare chest  
ready to meet your swords. Plant them there, and run,  
if you want an end to war. Your irresolution revealed,  
you lack the courage for sedition, men bent on flight,  
weary of your unbeaten general's victorious deeds.  
Go, leave me to my own destiny in the fight. Swords  
will find arms to wield them, and relinquishing yours  
Fortune will grant me a brave man for every weapon.  
If Pompey, fleeing, is followed by the people of Italy,  
and a mighty fleet, will victory not grant me an army  
to carry off the spoils of war, the reward for all your  
labours, then follow my laurelled chariot unscathed,  
while you, old men, drained of blood, a despicable  
mob now, the dregs of Rome, gaze on our triumph?  
Do you imagine Caesar's cause will feel a loss by

your desertion? If all the rivers threatened to refuse the sea their waters, its level would not fall by that loss, any more than the sea is raised by that inflow. Do you imagine you have given impetus to me? The gods will never stoop so low as to care about the lives or deaths of such as you; events depend on the actions of great men: humankind lives for the few. Under Caesar's flag you were the terrors of Spain and the North; yet you would have fled had Pompey led you. Labienus was a great soldier under Caesar, now a vile deserter he scurries over land and sea with that general he preferred to me. I shall think no more of your capacity for loyalty if failing to fight for me you equally fail to fight against me: any man who quits my standard yet fails to join Pompey could never be mine. This faction is surely favoured by the gods, who will that I must renew my army before embarking on great deeds. Ah, how great the burden Fortune lifts from my overburdened shoulders! I may now disband these legions who want all, yet for whom a whole world will not suffice. Now I shall fight for myself alone. Leave this camp and surrender my standards to true men, you cowardly civilians! Those few at whose urging this madness blazed are captive not to their general but their crime. Bow traitorous heads, and stretch your necks out to the axe! And you, raw recruits, who shall be the army's backbone now, watch them die, learn how to kill, and be killed.' The dull throng shrank at his fierce voice of menace, and a single general, whom they could have stripped of command, that vast army feared, as if, though they refuse, he could still direct their swords, making the very steel obey. Caesar himself feared hands and weapons would be denied him, to execute this wickedness, yet they accepted more than their cruel general conceived,

delivering him the executioners and their victims. There is no greater bond between criminal minds than seeing death imposed and suffered. The fatal pact concluded, order was restored, and the army returned to duty, their grievance appeased by death.

### **Book V:374-402 Caesar becomes dictator**

The army was ordered to Brindisi in a nine day march, and ships were summoned there, all that found harbour in remote Hydrus (Otranto), or ancient Tarentum, or by Leuca's quiet shores, or in the Salapinian Pool near Sipontum below its hills where Gargano's oak-woods curve along the Italian shore, where it faces northerlies from Dalmatia, and the Calabrian southerlies, itself jutting from Apulia into the waters of the Adriatic. Caesar himself, safer without his army, hurried off to a fearful Rome, a city learning to obey him even when he wore civilian dress. Yielding, naturally, to the people's prayer, Caesar adorned the calendar, adding a dictator to the list of consuls, for that age invented all the false titles that we have granted our masters for so long, and Caesar so that he might legitimise his use of force in every way sought to add the Roman axes to his swords, the fasces to his eagles. Adopting the empty titles of office, he set a fitting mark on those sad times, for what consul's name more suited the year of Pharsalia? The Campus saw a travesty of the annual ritual: the people were excluded but their votes entered, the names of the tribes declaimed, then the urn shaken to no purpose. Conning the sky for omens was banned; despite the thunder the augur played deaf; and even though an owl flew from the left, the signs were deemed favourable. Thereafter the consuls' office, once so revered, lost power, and began its decay, until consuls appointed

month by month mark the years in the record.  
Further the deity who presided in Trojan Alba,  
though unworthy of the customary rites once  
Latium was conquered, now bore new witness  
to the night-time fire that ends the Latin festival.

### **Book V:403-460 He sails for Chaonia**

Hastening from Rome more swiftly than lightning  
or a mother-tigress, Caesar quickly crossed the fields  
now lost to weeds that the Apulians, rendered idle,  
had ceased to till with their rakes. On reaching  
Brindisi, founded from Crete, he found the harbour  
closed by winter storms, the weather at that season  
filling the fleet with dread. He was frustrated by  
being detained ashore, the chance to bring the war  
to an end thwarted in idleness and sloth, while those  
who were no favourites of fortune would later find  
the seaways open and safe. So he sought to instil  
confidence in men who knew nothing of the waves:  
'When winter gales control sky and sea, they blow  
more steadily than those which vary with the fickle  
rain-filled spring weather. We will not need to hug  
the shoreline, but shall simply plough the waves on  
a direct course, driven forward by the northerly.  
Let it blow with all its power, bend our topmasts  
and send us all the way to the coast of Illyria;  
lest Pompey's ships, issuing from Corcyra,  
might overtake our slack sails with their oars.  
Loose the cables that hold back our conquering  
prows, wasting these cloudy skies, and angry seas.'  
The sun had sunk beneath the waves, the first stars  
risen in the sky, and the moon was casting shadows  
of her own, when the whole fleet raised anchor.  
Hauling the ropes, unfurling the sails, the sailors  
bent the yards and sloped the canvas, setting  
a course to larboard, stretching their topsails

to catch the wind that would otherwise be lost.  
But scarcely had the light breeze begun to fill  
the sails a little than they drooped and slackened  
against the mast, and out of sight of land that  
same breeze that had launched them fell away  
behind the vessels. The sea was motionless,  
the water dead calm, stiller than a stagnant pool.  
So the Bosphorus is still, closing the Black Sea,  
when the frozen Danube, gripped by frost, fails  
to stir the deep, the waters covered with ice.  
Then every ship is gripped as in a vice, horses  
clatter over the solid surface denied the ships,  
and the wheel-tracks of Bessian nomads score  
the Sea of Azov as the surge sounds beneath.  
The raging tide is still, and the dormant waters  
thicken in the gloomy depths, as though the sea  
is deserted by the natural force that governs it,  
forgets to obey its ebb and flow, unmoved by  
any fluctuation, unstirred by any ripple, nor  
glittering with any image of the sun. Becalmed,  
Caesar's fleet was open to innumerable dangers.  
On one hand the enemy vessels that might stir  
with oars the sluggish waters, on the other hand  
the dire approach of famine, as they lay still  
beleaguered by the calm. Strange prayers were  
invented for strange times, prayers for violent  
breakers and angry winds, that the waves might  
rouse from their torpid stillness, be sea indeed.  
But clouds and threatening waves were lacking;  
the stillness of sea and sky held not a threat  
of shipwreck. But night fleeing, day brought  
the rising sun free from cloud, its heat stirring  
the depths little by little, until the fleet neared  
the Ceraunian mountains. The ships gathered  
speed, the waves soon breaking in their wake,  
speeding along with favourable wind and tide  
till they dropped anchor on the coast of Palaeste.



## **Book V:461-503 Caesar summons Mark Antony**

Where the rival generals first halted and pitched camp near together was between the swift Genusus (Shkumbin) and the gentler Hapsus (Semeni), the latter made navigable by reason of a lake which drains imperceptibly with a quiet flow, while the former is filled with the snows melted by sun and rain. Neither river flows far, the sea is nearby, so they pass little land in their course. There was the place Fortune matched two such men of high renown: although the wretched world was disappointed in its hope that those two rivals might, with so slight a distance between them, condemn the present evil, since each might see the other's face and hear his voice; but rather Caesar, whom Pompey had loved for many years as his wife's father, never but once saw him more closely, after their bond was broken after the grandchildren born of that ill-starred marriage were dead, and that was later on the sands of the Nile. Though Caesar was eager for battle, he was obliged by his partisans left behind in Italy to delay the conflict. Mark Antony who boldly commanded all those forces was even then early in the civil war planning his Actium. Caesar begged him again and again to brook no delay: 'O cause of so much hardship to us all, why do you thwart the gods and fate? All else is done with my usual despatch, Fortune now asks you put the finishing touch to a war that has raced towards success. We are not divided by Syrtes' uncertain tides whose shoals mar Libya's shores. Am I risking your army in deeps I have not sounded, or leading you to unknown danger? Coward! Caesar bids you advance and not retreat. I go before, through the midst of our enemies, and my prow is grounded on shores held by others: is it my camp then you fear? I bewail the loss of hours granted by fate, wasting my prayers on wind and wave. Do not hold back men eager to cross the treacherous seas; if I know

them they will wish to join Caesar's army, risking shipwreck. I must even use words of resentment: this division of the world is unequal: Caesar with the whole senate holds Epirus, while you have all Italy to yourself.' Three or four times he summoned Antony with such pleas, but finding he yet delayed Caesar, believing he failed the gods not they him, dared of his own accord to brave the sea that others had feared to do when ordered. He knew daring would succeed by the gods' favour, and hoped to surmount in a little boat waves fleets must fear.

### **Book V:504-576 Caesar braves the sea**

Drowsy night had eased the weary labour of war, a brief respite for the wretches over whose bodies their low rank granted sleep power; now the camp was silent, and the third hour had roused the second watch. Moving anxiously through the deep silence, Caesar prepared to act as even the least scarcely dare, to forsake all and take Fortune as his sole companion. He passed beyond the tents, stepped over the bodies of the sleeping sentries, silently vexed that he could do so; followed the winding shore and found a boat moored by a rope to the hollow cliffs at the sea's edge. The owner and skipper had a hut nearby for shelter and security; no timber framing it, the hut was woven of bare rushes and reeds from the marshes, its open side protected by an upturned skiff. Here Caesar struck repeatedly on the door, till the hut shook. Amyclas rose from his soft bed of seaweed, asking: 'What shipwrecked sailor seeks my roof; whom has chance forced to seek aid from my hut?' So saying, he drew a rope-torch from a tall pile of cooling ashes, fanning the slender spark till it flamed. Untroubled by war, he knew that poor men's huts are no spoil in times of civil strife. How safe and untroubled the poor man's

life and his humble dwelling! O how blind men are yet to the gifts of heaven! What temple, what fort would not shake in turmoil should Caesar knock? When this door was opened the general spoke: 'Swell your hopes, man, and expect a reward beyond your prayers. If you obey my orders, carry me to Italy, you shall not owe all to your toils, nor lead an impoverished old age. Do not hesitate to place your fate in the gods' hands, who wish to fill your humble home with sudden wealth.' So Caesar spoke, though he wore plebeian dress, being incapable of common speech. Then the man of poverty, Amyclas, answered. 'Many things warn me not to trust to the sea, tonight; the sun drew no reddened clouds with it into the waves, and showed no ring of rays: with fractured light, one half of his orb summoned the south wind, the other half the north. Also his disc was faint and dim at sunset, and the feeble light allowed the eye to gaze there. The moon too, on rising failed to shine with slender horn, nor was carved in a clear curve at the centre extending tapering points in a upright arc. She reddened with signs of storm, then dim with a sallow face, paled as her face passed behind a cloud. And I mistrust the swaying trees, the beat of the waves onshore; how the errant dolphin thrusts against the swell, the cormorant seeks dry land, the heron ventures to fly trusting to water-cleaving wings, the crow anticipating rain paces the shore with lurching gait, his head sprinkled by the brine. Yet if great events demand it, I cannot hesitate to lend a hand, either I go where you command, or not I but the wind and waves shall deny you.' So saying he loosed the boat, and spread canvas to the winds, at whose motion not only the meteors seemed shaken that leave diffuse trails behind them as they fall, but

the fixed stars too in the depths of the heavens.  
A tremor of darkness blackened the sea's ridges;  
the angry flood boiled with a long swell, wave  
upon wave, and the billowing waters, stirred  
before the coming storm, marked the growing gale.  
Then the master of the wavering craft cried: 'See  
what the cruel sea is brewing. I am unsure whether  
it threatens a westerly or a southerly, the shifting  
flow strikes us from both directions. A southerly  
grips sky and cloud; but note the sea's moaning,  
a north-westerly tempest will overcome the waves.  
In such a gale, neither shipwrecked crew nor vessel  
shall ever reach the shore of Italy. Our one chance  
is to renounce all hopes of the passage denied us  
and retrace our course. Let me seek the shore nearby  
in our battered craft, lest the land proves unreachable.'

#### **Book V:577-637 The tempest**

Confident that all perils would give way before him,  
Caesar cried: 'Scorn the sea's threats, spread our sail  
to the raging wind. Seek Italy at my command though  
you refuse that of heaven. Only your ignorance of whom  
you carry justifies your fear. Here is one whom the gods  
never desert, whom fate treats unjustly if she comes only  
in answer to his prayers. Thread the heart of the tempest,  
secure in my protection. This turmoil concerns the sea  
and sky, not our vessel: that she bears Caesar will defend  
her from the waves. The fierce fury of the winds will have  
brief duration: this vessel shall thrust aside the waves.  
Steady your helm, flee the nearby coastline with your sail:  
believe you have won harbour in Italy only when other  
shores can no longer offer safety to our vessel. You know  
naught of what this great tempest signifies: by this tumult  
of sea and sky it seeks to reveal what Fortune grants me.'  
Before he could speak more, the raging gale struck the boat  
carrying away the fluttering canvas and the torn rigging,

from the frail mast; the hull groaning as the seams gave way. Now imminent danger loomed on every side. A westerly first reared its head over the Atlantic, and roused the tide till the sea enraged lifted its waves to drench the cliffs except that cold northerly gusts blowing across it beat the flood backward till it was doubtful which way the gouts of water would fall. The fury of the Scythian northerly prevailed, lashing the waves and lowering the sea above the sands below. Unable to drive the breakers onshore, they met the ebb raised by the westerly, and even when the gusts diminished the angry waves fought. I doubt not a fierce easterly threatened, and a southerly, black with storm, was freed from its prison, Aeolus' cave, that all the winds blowing from their accustomed quarters, guarding each region with violent hurricanes, held the ocean in place. Diverse seas were snatched by the storm and carried away by the winds: the Tyrrhene fed the Aegean while the errant Adriatic roared with the Ionian. Mountains the waves had often beaten against in vain were buried that day! Earth conquered yielded towering peaks to the depths! Such waves were never born on any shore: they rolled from another region, from the outer seas, the waters circling the world drove on those teeming breakers. So the ruler of Olympus, in ages past, his lightning flagging, called on his brother's trident, earth was added to the second kingdom and Ocean, swallowing the human race, denied all limit, content with no boundary but the sky. So now, the vast mass of water would have risen to the very stars had not the ruler of the gods weighted the sea with cloud. The darkness was not that of night: the sky was hidden, veiled with infernal pallor, and burdened with vapours, and from the cloud rain poured into the sea. Even the light ebbed in fear, no bright lightning flashed, but the stormy sky glowed dimly. Then the dome of the heavens quaked, the lofty sky thundered, and the axle of the poles, jarred, was troubled. Nature feared Chaos come again: it seemed the harmonious elements had burst their bonds, and Night returned to confuse the shades below with the gods above;

their one hope that they might not perish in the world's ruin.

### **Book V:638-677 Caesar reaches Illyria again**

As high as the Leucadian cliffs are seen towering over a calm sea, such was the height the fearful mariners saw as they topped the great waves and when those swollen monsters opened their jaws again the mast barely showed above the billows. The sails touched cloud, the keel rested on the sea-floor that the water no longer covered, not sinking but piling up in heaps to form the waves. The forces precluded exercise of skill, and the steersmen never knew whether to confront the rollers or yield to them. Only the conflict of the waters aided the wretched voyagers, wave preventing wave from drowning the vessel; when one struck her side, another sea countered it, righting her, kept erect by all the winds at once. It is not the shoals of low-lying Sason threaten the mariners, nor Thessaly's winding rocky coast, nor the unkind harbours of the Ambracian shore, but rather the peaks of the Ceraunian mountains. Caesar at last thought the danger worthy of his fate. 'How the gods labour to work my ruin, threatening my little craft with such a mighty storm! If the glory of my end, denied the battlefield, has now been granted to the deep, I will accept whatever death the powers that be appoint. Though that day, hastened on by destiny, cuts short a great career, what I have done is sufficient. I have conquered the northern nations, and by fear alone quelled the Roman forces opposed to me; Rome has seen Pompey take second place to me; by order of the people I hold the consulship that force of arms denied; no title Rome awards is missing from my record; and none but you, Fortune, who alone are privy to my ambitions, will grieve that, though I go down to the Stygian shades a consul and dictator loaded with honours, I shall die a mere citizen. No funeral is owed me, you gods! Leave my broken corpse amongst the waves, let pyre and grave be absent, so long as my memory is feared forever, creating dread in every land.' As he spoke, marvellous to tell, a tenth wave lifted him in

the wind-beaten vessel, and the breaker not hurling him back again from its tall foaming crest carried him onwards till it beached him on shore, on a narrow strip of sand clear of the jagged rocks. He touched Illyria again, in a moment regaining countless realms and cities and his own destiny.

### **Book V:678-721 Caesar's fleet reaches Nymphaion**

But on Caesar's return next day to his camp and comrades they were not deceived as by his previous secret departure. Gathering round their general they wept, bombarding him with not unwelcome moans and laments: 'To what lengths, hard-hearted Caesar, rash courage has led you! To what fate did you abandon our worthless lives, when you gave yourself to the destructive power of the storm? It is cruel of you to court death, when the safety and very existence of so many nations depends on you, when so large a part of the world has chosen you as leader. Did none of your friends deserve the honour of not living to survive you? While the sea drove you onward, our bodies were lost to idle sleep. Ah, what shame on us! You set course for Italy, thinking it cruel to ask others to cross the savage waves. It is usually despair that drives men headlong into dangerous undertakings and mortal peril; yet you, the master now of the world, grant the sea such licence! Why weary the powers that be? Fortune has brought you safe to shore. Is that to be the extent of her help and favour where the war is concerned? Is this the use you choose to make of divine aid, to be not the ruler of the world, the master of mankind, but the happy survivor of shipwreck?' While they spoke, night fled, day bathed them in bright sunlight and, the winds permitting, the sea subdued calmed its swollen billows. When the captains in Italy too, saw the sea's power exhausted and a northerly clearing the sky, calming the force of the flood, they loosed their ships. Steered by skillful hands these kept close together on the same

course, driven by the wind, so the fleet advanced over the wide waters, ship beside ship, like soldiers marching on land. But night, cruelly robbing them of a clear wind, reduced their onward passage, breaking their formation. So the migrating cranes, driven by winter from the icy Strymon to the warmer Nile, first form various shapes at random; then as wind on high strikes their outspread wings they assemble in dense flights merging smoothly; until those birds finally scatter, their letter-like formations dispersing. When day returned and a brisk dawn breeze caught the sails, the ships, attempting in vain to reach Lissus (Lezha), sailed beyond it to reach Nymphaion, where a southerly, succeeding the northerly, allowed them to anchor in its waters, unprotected to the north.

#### **Book V:722-760 Pompey speaks to Cornelia his wife**

Pompey, seeing Caesar's forces gathering in full strength from all directions, knew that his army must soon face the ultimate test of fierce battle, and so decided to place his wife, Cornelia, his precious charge, in a safe haven, and conceal her in secluded Lesbos far from the tumult of savage war. How powerfully a right affection rules wedded hearts! Love made even you, Pompey, anxious and fearful of battle! What he most wished to preserve from the blows of Fortune, who would decide the fate of Rome and the world, that thing was his wife alone. Though his purpose was set, the words still failed him: he preferred to yield to all the blandishments of delay, postpone what must come, steal a reprieve from destiny. Night was ending, the torpor of sleep banished, when Cornelia clasped her care-laden husband in her arms, seeking his dear lips as he turned away, and wondering at his damp cheeks, stricken by a malaise she could not fathom, trembling to find her husband, Pompey, in tears. Sighing, he said: 'My wife, dearer to me than life when it was sweet not wearisome as now, the sad day is come



that we have fended off for so long yet not long enough. Caesar is upon us, in force. We must accept battle, yet Lesbos will hide you, safe from war. Do not tempt me with prayers, I have already denied them to myself. You will not be separated from me long, the outcome will soon be known, the greatest ruin comes swiftly. It is enough if you simply hear news of the risks I take, your love for me is less than I believe if you can bear to gaze on civil war. As for me, now war is at hand, I would be ashamed to enjoy peaceful sleep at my wife's side, and stir in her embrace while the war-trumpets rouse a suffering world. I fear to commit myself to civil war unless I am saddened by a sacrifice of my own. You meanwhile must be hidden, safer than any nation or king; if you are far away the full weight of your husband's destiny need not bear upon you. Should the gods destroy my army, let the best part of Pompey survive, prove welcoming to me if fate and the victor's cruelty oppress me.' Cornelia could barely sustain so great a sorrow, her senses fled from her stricken breast.

### **Book V:761-815 Cornelia replies**

At last her voice could utter a sorrowful remonstrance: 'It is not for me, Magnus, to complain of the gods, or of our lot in marriage: it is not death or the final brand of the dread funeral pyre that separates us, but by a fate all too frequent and familiar I lose my husband because he dismisses me. The enemy drawing near, it seems we must dissolve our marriage bond and so appease your former wife's father! Is this how you regard my loyalty, Magnus? Do you think my safety separate from yours? Have we not both been long involved in the one course? Cruel man, do you bid me offer myself to the lightning and the world's ruin, alone? Do you think that a fair end for me, dying of separation while you yet dream

of success? Suppose I refuse to suffer after, and wish to follow you swiftly to the shades, yet must live on until the sad news of your death reaches me far away? Besides, it is cruel to tempt fate and school me to bear that great sorrow: pardon the thought, but I fear I might find life endurable. And yet, if prayers have worth, if the gods hear mine, may your wife be the last to hear the outcome. I will haunt the cliffs of Lesbos after your victory, and dread the ship that brings such news, for news of victory will not quell my fears, since in the deserted place you cast me, I might fall captive to Caesar even though he flees. Lesbos' shore will be lit by an exile's name: who will not know of the refuge Mytilene offers, if it harbours Pompey's wife? This then is my last prayer: if defeat makes flight your safest course, and you entrust yourself to the waves, steer your ill-starred barque to any isle but Lesbos, since where I am the enemy will look for you.' So saying, she sprang wildly from their bed, refusing to delay her torment a moment longer. She could not bear to clasp her sorrowing husband's head or breast in her dear arms, and the last fruits of their long love were lost. They grieved in haste, and neither had heart to say a last 'farewell'; no day of their lives was more sorrowful, for the grief to come was suffered by hearts already strengthened and inured to their misfortunes. The unhappy woman swooned and fell, but caught in her attendants' arms was carried to the sandy shore. There she clutched the ground, till lifted on board. She had been less stricken when, hard pressed by cruel Caesar's armies, they had left the coast of Italy their homeland. Then Magnus' loyal companion, now she alone departed, leaving Pompey the general behind. The next night brought no sleep, her empty bed's widowed coldness and silence were strange to her in her solitude; and she felt defenceless far from her husband. How often, weighed with drowsiness, she

clasped the empty couch with deluded arms! How often,  
forgetful of exile, she sought her husband in the dark!  
For though her marrow burned with hidden fires, she  
found no ease in spreading her limbs across the bed,  
keeping a part reserved for him. She feared she had  
lost her Pompey forever; but heaven intended worse.  
The sad hour loomed that would return Magnus to her.

### **End of Book V**

### **Book VI:1-27 Pompey defends Dyrrachium (Durrës)**

So the generals, having pitched their camps on neighbouring heights, minds set on battle, the armies came face to face, and the gods gazed on the twin combatants. Caesar, scorning to take Greek city after city, refusing to accept further victory from fate, except victory over his kinsman, sought, with all the force of prayer, the hour, fateful for the world, in which all would be at stake, choosing that cast of the die which must destroy one leader or the other. Showing himself never backward in seeking the ruin of Rome, three times he deployed his squadrons with their threatening standards on the hill-tops. But when he saw that Pompey, trusting to his defensive works, could not be tempted to fight by a show of force, he struck camp and marched swiftly through wooded country that hid his plan to seize the fortress of Dyrrachium. Pompey forestalled his move by following the coastline and pitching camp on the hill that the Taulantians call Petra, in order to defend that Corinthian colony, a city protected by its cliffs. No ancient fortifications surround it, no stones raised by mortal hand, which though they raise their structures high, see them fall an easy prey to siege, or all-raiding time: its natural defences alone remain bastions no siege-engine can shatter. Surrounded by a depth of sea on all sides close to shore, and by cliffs that fling back the breakers, only a raised neck of land of moderate size stops the peninsula forming an island. Its walls hang over abysses of rock, precipices feared by mariners, where southerly gales raising the raging Ionian waves, hurl their spray high above to the tallest roofs, shaking the walls of houses and temples.

### **Book VI:28-63 Caesar hems Pompey in**

Here Caesar's mind was captured by an audacious plan: though the enemy force was scattered over a wide range of hills, he planned to surround them with a line of remote entrenchments without their knowing. He took a survey of the ground with the naked eye, and not content merely

to raise instant walls of crumbling turf had huge rocks and blocks of quarry stone brought there, the remains of houses, and shattered walls. A structure rose, that no strong battering ram nor violent engine of war could raze. The mountains were pierced, and Caesar raised a wall of identical height across the hills: he opened trenches, set defensive towers at intervals along its length; a sweeping boundary enclosed upland pastures, wooded wastelands, forests, trapping the wild creatures in an enclosing snare. Pompey had plains enough and grazing in abundance, shifting his camp within Caesar's encircling lines; there many streams rose to exhaust themselves and vanished, while Caesar viewing distant works was forced to rest, wearied, in the midst of the fields. Now let legend sing the walls of Troy, and ascribe them to the gods, and let the flying Parthians in retreat, cry wonder at Babylon's encircling wall of brick. As great a space as is bounded by the Tigris or swift Orontes, one large enough to hold a kingdom of Assyrians in the east, see, here enclosed by works constructed hastily under the exigencies of war. Such transient effort! That labour might have linked Sestos to Abydos, piling up earth till the Hellespont was bridged; or Corinth might have been separated from Pelops' realm by canal, saving ships the long haul round Cape Malea; or men might have defied nature elsewhere, and changed some other region for the better. But there the field of war contracted, there blood was shed to flow thereafter over every land; there the victims of Pharsalia and Thapsus were penned; civil madness raging in a narrow pound.

#### **Book VI:64-117 Both camps afflicted**

At first the rise of these works went unnoticed by Pompey, as a man who lives in the heart of Sicily fails to hear the yelp of Scylla's dogs, or as the Britons in the north fail to hear the raging breakers when the channel tides break on the southern shores. But on seeing his position

encircled by wide entrenchments, he led his forces down from Petra's stronghold and scattered them over sundry hills to extend Caesar's troops and overstretch them as they attempted a blockade with sparsely ordered lines. As for himself he claimed as much land defended by a palisade, as separates illustrious Rome from Aricia whose grove is sacred to Mycenaean Diana; the same as if Tiber ran from Rome unbending direct to the sea. No war-cry sounds, missiles fly to and fro at random, and injury is often wrought merely testing the distance. More urgent problems stop the leaders from engaging. Pompey was hampered by lack of fodder: the cavalry had destroyed it, hooves ploughing up the grassy plains. War-horses starved on close-cropped ground, scorning the mangers of imported hay, and neighing for fresh grass, halting with quivering haunches in the act of wheeling, and collapsing to die. As their corpses rotted, limb from limb, the stagnant air rose in a dark pestilential cloud of putrefaction. Such is the exhalation Nisida yields from its volcanic rocks, as Typhon's depths breathe madness and death. The troops were stricken, and the water, more absorbent than air of foulness, now hardened their innards with its evils. The tightened skin grew rigid, making their eyes start from their sockets, and the fiery pestilence, hot with fever, inflamed their faces, their necks unable to bear the head's weight. Thus swift death increasingly bore all before it; no period of illness divided life from death, death arriving with infection; and the mass of victims worsened the plague, since unburied corpses lay beside the living. All the burial men could give was to throw the bodies of their stricken countrymen beyond the line of tents. Yet their ills were lessened by having the sea at their backs, the air stirred by the northerlies, by ships fully loaded with foreign grain, with access to the shore. Caesar's army, too, though camped on open heights, free to range the land, untroubled by foul air or stagnant wells, still suffered hunger pangs as though themselves besieged.

The corn was not yet ripe enough for harvest, so wretched men were seen lying flat on the ground grazing like beasts, plucking the foliage from trees and bushes, cutting dubious leaves from unknown roots. Though besieging the well-fed enemy army, they fought for food, whatever they could seethe over a fire, shred with their teeth, swallow with abraded throats, many things thought inedible by humans.

### **Book VI:118-195 Scaeva's heroism at Minicius**

When Pompey first felt free to burst the confines and emerge, permitting himself to range widely, he did not seek the secret dark of night, scorning to steal a march while the enemy rested. He sought instead to force a wide breach, razing their ramparts, throwing down their towers, facing every foe, by a path that bloodshed must open. One section of the fortifications nearby seemed to offer opportunities, left open by Minicius' fortress, while broken ground screened him with a thick wooded cover. There he marched his men, without raising dust, and his army reached the ramparts without warning. Now, his Roman eagles in a trice glittered on the plain, now all his trumpets sounded. So his victory should owe less to the sword, the sudden alarm confounded the enemy. What valour could do, they did; dying at their posts where duty placed them. The tempest of javelins was wasted, lacking an enemy now to be dealt such wounds. Then brands were hurled, falling and rolling in smoky flames; Then the echoing turrets trembled and threatened to collapse, ramparts sounding to the hail of blows from thudding timber. Then Pompey's eagles passed the summit of the tall mound, granting him command of the free spaces. Though Fortune seemed to have conspired with those thousand squadrons, though Caesar could not hold the place, one man yet snatched it from the conquerors, and refused its capture, while he still wielded weapons and was not yet laid low, denying Pompey. Scaeva was his name: he had served in the ranks since before the fierce tribes of the Rhone were first encountered, promoted for shedding his blood, bearing the vine-staff with centurion's

rank, ready for anything, not realising that valour is a heinous crime in civil war. Seeing his comrades ground their weapons and seek safety in flight, he cried: 'Where is fear driving you, that wretched fear that is a stranger to Caesar's armies? Do you turn your backs on death? Soldiers, are you not ashamed that you are missing from the heaps of bodies, are unsought among the corpses? If duty seems distant, will not anger at least ensure you stand your ground? The enemy host elects us, of all the army, to charge from the ranks. This day will cost Pompey no small amount of blood. I would seek the shades more happily with Caesar watching: but since fate denies me that, let Pompey praise my fall. Beat against their weapons till they shatter, and blunt their steel with your bodies. Far off the dust rises while the roar of destruction sounds, and this clash of arms strikes Caesar's unsuspecting ears. We conquer, comrades: and he will come, to claim the stronghold, where we die.' His speech roused greater enthusiasm than the first blast of the war-trumpet. The soldiers, marvelling at Scaeva, eager to look on, follow, to see if courage, outnumbered and surrounded, can offer more than death. Taking his stand on the crumbling rampart, he first rolled the enemy corpses from the choked turrets, burying his foes beneath the bodies. The collapsing structures became weapons as he menaced the enemy with wooden beams, stone blocks, or his own body. Now with stakes, now with strong poles he thrust his adversaries from the wall. His sword severed hands that grasped the battlements. He crushed one man's skull with a rock, scattering the brains ill-protected by their brittle shell of bone: he set another's hair and beard ablaze, the flames crackling as the eye sockets scorched. The heap of dead rose level with the wall. Then he sprang over the enemy spikes into their midst, swiftly and surely as a leopard springs over the tips of the hunters' spears. Wedged tight among the foe, circled by a whole army, he slew men at his back, until his blade no longer served the function of a sword, so blunted and dulled by caked blood it bruised but failed to wound. Every hand and spear



was turned towards him; no lance, no aim missed its mark, and Fortune witnessed something new to war, one man against an army. His hard shield-boss rang to endless blows, his hollow helm, now shattered, galled the brow it covered, and nothing covered his vital organs but the spear-shafts that stuck fast in his flesh and reached down to his bones.

### **Book VI:196-262 Scaeva slays Aulus**

Madmen, why waste your javelin casts and arrow shots that will not reach the very life? To fell him you must employ a powered missile or the wall-defying weight of a huge boulder; an iron battering-ram, or a catapult alone will drive him from the threshold of the gateway. He stands, no fragile wall defending Caesar, holding Pompey at bay. Fearing lest his shield arm be thought idle, or that he has sought to survive, he no longer guards his breast, he faces the wounding blows naked, bearing a thicket of spears in his flesh, choosing in his weariness a foe to crush in death. So an African elephant attacked by a dense throng, their missiles bounding from its thick hide, shrugs the clinging spearheads from its flesh, its vitals safely protected, so that the javelins that pierce and hold draw little blood from the beast, the wounds from the countless spears and barbs too slight to kill. Behold, a Cretan arrow, fired at Scaeva from a distance more truly aimed than anticipated, struck his head, piercing his left eyeball. Scaeva, bravely, pulled out the clinging arrow, with the eyeball and its ligaments, and trampled on eye and arrow both. So in the arena, when the Libyan has hurled his javelin from its sling, a Pannonian bear, maddened by the wound, turns on the injury, attacks in rage the shaft that struck, whirling round and chasing the spear-haft that circles with it. Rage convulsed Scaeva's features, his mutilated face one mass of bleeding flesh. A shout from his victors rose to the heavens; a little blood from a wound on

Caesar's self would not have cheered them more. Scaeva then suppressed his emotion, hiding it deep in his heart, and banishing warlike ardour from his features, he said mildly: 'Spare me, countrymen, avert your steel. Wounds can do no more to bring about my death; no more spears are needed, only the drawing of those that have already pierced me. Lift me, and set me still living in Pompey's camp. Do your leader this service; let me be an example of desertion from Caesar, not of glorious death.' Aulus, ill-fated, believed this cunning speech, not seeing that Scaeva's sword was at the ready, and was about to lift captive and blade together when, lightening-swift, Scaeva struck him full in the throat. Scaeva's ardour rose, his enemy's death reviving him. 'Whoever thought Scaeva finished, let him pay the price,' he cried. 'Let Pompey bow his head and lower the standards before Caesar, if he wants this sword to rest. Perhaps you think I am like you, afraid to die? Pompey and the Senate's cause is less to you than this death to me.' Even as he spoke a cloud of dust showed Caesar's cohorts approaching, that fact alone saving Pompey from shameful defeat, and the reproach that his whole army had fled before you alone, Scaeva. As the foe retreated, the hero collapsed, blood draining from him; only the fight had lent him strength. As he fell a crowd of his friends caught him, gladly raising his limp body on their shoulders. They worshipped the force that seemed to live in that mutilated frame, a still-breathing icon of that noble deity, Valour. They vied with each other in plucking spears from your flesh, adorning the breast of naked Mars and statues of the other gods with your armour, Scaeva, happier in this claim to fame if you had routed

hardy Iberians, the Cantabrians with their short spears, or the Teutones with their long ones. But you can never adorn the Thunderer's shrine with your trophies, nor will you shout for joy in the triumph. Unhappy man, how great your bravery that merely paved the way for a tyrant!

### **Book VI:263-313 Pompey attacks, Caesar retreats**

Though beaten back at this point of his lines, Pompey did not rest behind his defences, or delay the advance, any more than the sea wearies, though driven against the cliffs that stem its tide by rising winds, its waves gnawing the high headlands that thus prepare for their own later ruin. He sought the forts fronting calm bays, attacking them simultaneously by land and sea, and he spread his army far and wide, extending his forces on the broad plain, using this chance to shift his ground. So the swollen Po, its estuary flooding, will overflow its banks, heaped into levees, and swamp the fields. If the dykes yield and fall, failing to withstand the force of the roaring waters, the river bursts through drowning plains alien to it; here some flee their land, while there they gain new fields by the river's gift. Now Caesar had scarce been aware of the fight, the news conveyed to him by a signal fire from a watch-tower. He found the walls already down, the dust cold and settled, all signs of ruin as if ancient. The very peacefulness kindled his anger, stirred by the Pompeians' idleness, at rest after defeating Caesar. He advanced even if it were towards disaster, so long as it troubled their rejoicing. He rushed to threaten Torquatus, who at the sight of his troops, stirred himself like a mariner furling every sail on the trembling mast, before the wind off Circeii. He brought his men behind the curtain wall, to rank them closely in a narrow circuit. Caesar had already passed the outermost ring of defences, when Pompey launched his troops from every height,

pouring down his forces against the encircled enemy. Caesar's soldiers felt more fear than the valley-folk of Enna do when the southerly blows and Etna looses rivers of fire over the plain, from its abysses; shaken before battle by the clouds of blinding dust, demoralised by dread, flight sending them towards the foe, rushing on death in panic. The civil war might have ended there, peace following final bloodshed, but Pompey restrained his army in their fury. If a Sulla had conquered there, you, Rome might have ruled yourself; happily, free of tyrants! Grievous it is, and grievous shall ever be, that you, Caesar, gained by your deepest crime, in opposing a patriotic foe. Cruel fate! Libya and Spain would not have mourned for the disasters at Utica and Munda; neither would the Nile, defiled by vile bloodshed, have borne that corpse nobler than a Pharaoh's; King Juba's naked body would not have burdened the African sand, nor Metellus Scipio appeased the Carthaginian dead with his blood; nor the living have lost their virtuous Cato. That day might have ended your ills, Rome, and erased Pharsalia from the scroll of fate.

### **Book VI:314-380 Caesar heads for Thessaly**

Caesar abandoned the site he had occupied against the will of heaven, and headed for Thessaly with his battered army. Pompey chose to pursue his father-in-law's forces wherever they went, and urged by his officers to change his plans, and return to his native Italy, now his enemy was absent, he answered: 'I shall never return like Caesar to my country, Rome shall not see me again till my forces are disbanded. I might have held Italy when strife began if I had chosen to initiate warfare in the shrines of Rome, been willing to fight in the midst of the Forum. I would pass beyond the furthest regions of Scythian cold, beyond the burning sands, to relinquish war. Rome, shall I who fled to spare you conflict, rob you of peace now when I am the victor? Ah, rather, to spare you suffering in this struggle, Caesar

shall call you his.' So Pompey spoke, and led his forces eastwards, following a winding route, where Illyria's deep gorges open, reaching that Thessaly fate destined for war. Mount Pelion's ridge bounds Thessaly in the quarter where the winter sun rises, Mount Ossa where in high summer its shade obstructs the rays of Phoebus rising in the dawn; while wooded Othrys dispels the flames of the southern sky, at midsummer, opposing the brow of the all-devouring Lion; and Mount Pindus outfacing westerlies and north-westerlies, where daylight ebbs hastens evening on; while those who live at the foot of Olympus never dreading the northerlies, know nothing of the Great Bear's stars shining a whole night long. The low-lying lands in the region between these mountains were once covered with endless marshes; since the plains retained the waters, and the Vale of Tempe was insufficient for them to reach the sea they formed continuous swampland, and their only course was to rise. But when Hercules lifted Ossa's weight from Olympus, the sea felt a sudden onrush of waters as Thessalian Pharsalos, that realm of Achilles the hero born of a sea-goddess, rose above the surface, a realm better drowned forever. There rose too, Phylace whose king was first to land in the war at Troy; Pteleos; Dorion, that laments the Muses' anger and blind Thamyras; Trachis; Meliboea whose Philoctetes received Hercules' bow, for lighting that hero's funeral pyre; Larisa, powerful once; and the sites where the plough now passes over famed Argos, where Echion's Thebes once stood, to which Agave howling bore the head of Pentheus giving it to the funeral pyre, grieving to have carried off no other part of his flesh. Thus the swamp was drained forming a host of rivers. From there the Aeas, clear in its flow but of little volume, runs westward to the Ionian Sea, the Inachus glides with no more powerful a current (he was the river-god, father of ravished Io) nor the Achelous (he almost won Deianeira, Oeneus' daughter) that silts the Echinades islands; there, the Euhenos, stained as it is with Nessus' blood runs through Meleager's Calydon; there Spercheos' swift stream meets the Malian Gulf's wave,

and the pure depths of the Amphrysos water those pastures where Apollo herded cattle. There, the Asopos starts its flow, and the Black River, and the Phoenix; there, the Anauros, free of moist vapours, dew-drenched air, capricious breezes. There too are the rivers which do not reach the sea themselves but are tributaries of Peneus - the Apidanus, robbed of its flow, the Enipeus never swift until it finds Peneus, and the Titaresos, which alone, meeting with that river, keeps its waters intact, glides on the surface, as though the greater river were dry land, for legend says its stream flows from the pool of Styx, and so, mindful of its source, scorns commingling with common water, inspiring still that awe of its current the gods themselves feel.

#### **Book VI:381-412 The accursed land**

Once the waters had flowed away leaving dry land, the fertile soil was furrowed by the ploughs of the Bebryces; the labour of Leleges drove the share deep; the ground was broken by Aeolidae and Dolopians, by Magnesians breeders of horses, Minyae builders of ships. There in the caves of Pelethronium, the cloud impregnated by Ixion bore the bi-formed Centaurs – Monychus who shattered Pholoe's hard rock with his hooves; bold Rhoecus who employed uprooted ash-trees as spears, beneath Oeta's peak, trees the northerlies failed to overturn; Pholus who entertained great Hercules; you, presumptuous Nessus, who ferried travellers over the river and was doomed to feel Hercules' arrows; and you, aged Chiron, whose stars, those of Sagittarius, gleam in the winter sky, as they aim their Thessalian bow at the greater constellation of Scorpio. In this soil the seeds of cruel war quickened. From her rock struck by the sea's trident first emerged the Thessalian war-horse, threatening dire conflict; here he first champed at the steel bit, unused to his Lapith master's bridle, that set him foaming at the mouth. There Argo, the first ship to cut the waves, was launched from the shores of Pagasae, sending men, creatures of the land, out on the unknown deep. There Ionos, King of Thessaly, was first to hammer molten

metal into shape, melting silver in the flames, forming gold into coins, and smelting copper in huge furnaces. There it was granted men to count their wealth, tempting them to the evils of war. From Thessaly too, the Python, greatest of serpents, glided south to Delphi; thus the laurels for the Pythian Games are sourced from there. And from there rebellious Aloeus launched his giant sons against the gods, when Mount Pelion, piled on Olympus, almost reached the stars, and Mount Ossa, encroaching on the planets' orbits, obstructed their course.

#### **Book VI:413-506 Thessalian witchcraft**

Once the generals had set up camp in that accursed land all minds were troubled by presentiments of war; it was plain that the fateful hour, the final outcome, was upon them, and that destiny drew near. The cowards trembled, expecting the worst; others, strengthening themselves to meet the unknown, experienced hope as well as fear, while among that uncertain host was Sextus, Pompey's unworthy son, who later, exiled, stained Scylla's waters with Sicilian piracy, tarnishing his father's naval glory. Impatient of delay and troubled by whatever was to come, fear drove him to seek prior knowledge of fate's course, but it was not the Delian tripods nor Delphi's caverns that he tried, nor cared he to inquire what sounds issue from Jupiter's cauldron at Dodona, whose oak-trees furnished man's first nourishment; he did not ask who could read the future from sacrificial entrails, interpret the flight of birds, the lightning in the sky, or probe the stars with Babylonian lore, he avoided knowledge which though secret was yet permitted. He sought savage rites of witchcraft that the gods abhor, and those funereal practices on grim altars. He worshipped Dis and the shades below, a wretch convinced the gods above knew too little. The place the army camped fuelled his false and cruel delusion, being near the dwellings of those Thessalian witches

whom no conjuring of imaginary horrors can outdo,  
and whose arts concern all that is thought impossible.  
Moreover Thessaly's heights yield many baneful herbs,  
its rocks bear witness to wizards chanting deadly spells.  
A host of plants grow there with numinous powers;  
Colchian Medea plucked herbs from Thessalian soil  
to carry over the sea. The impious spells of that dire  
cohort reach the ears of the gods, deaf to so many  
nations and peoples. Their voices alone penetrate  
the furthest depths of the heavens, bearing words  
that bind the reluctant powers whose duty towards  
the sky and the spinning firmament fails to distract  
their listening. When the Thessalian witches' dark  
murmurings reach the stars the gods will be enticed  
from other altars, though Persian Babylon, though  
arcane Memphis open every shrine of their ancient  
magi. Through their spells an un-predestined love  
steals into resistant hearts, and severe old age burns  
with illicit passion. Not their baleful concoctions  
alone have power, not their stealing the caul from  
the foal, a sign that the mare will love her offspring,  
the caul that filled with the waters veils its forehead;  
for even when unaffected by foul poisonous draughts,  
the minds of men are destroyed by their incantations.  
Those no marriage pledge nor allurements of beauty  
binds, are drawn by the twirling magic of twisted  
threads. Natural order ceases, daylight is held back  
by the endless night; the ether disobeys all laws,  
the swift firmament stalls at the sound of their chant,  
and Jupiter, urging onward the flying heavens on their  
axle, wonders why they fall still. Now those witches  
drench the world with rain, and veil the burning sun  
with cloud, and the heavens sound, Jupiter unaware;  
now with spells they disperse the watery canopy,  
and the dishevelled tresses of the thunder-clouds.  
The ocean rises though the winds are still; or  
instead is forbidden to feel the storm, falling



silent while the southerly blusters, though sails  
speed the ships on, swelling against the breeze.  
Now the waterfall on the steep cliff-face halts;  
the river flows, but not on its downward course.  
The Nile's summer inundation fails; Maeander  
straightens out its channel; Arar (Saône) drives  
the sluggish Rhone; the mountains lower their  
peaks and level their ridges; Olympus finds now  
the clouds are high above; and Scythian snows  
thaw in wintry cold despite the sun's absence.  
When the tide swells under the moon, the spells  
cast by Thessalian witches cause its ebb, guard  
the shore. Earth's ponderous mass too is shaken  
on its axis, the pressure acting towards its centre  
eases, the great orb opens struck by the spell,  
and reveals to sight the revolving sky beneath.  
Every creature with power to cause death, born  
to harm, both fears the Thessalian witches and  
supplies their arts with a means of destruction.  
The savage tiger, the fierce and noble lion, fawn  
upon them lick their hands; the snake unwinding  
his chilly coils stretches at full length on the cold  
ground; knotted vipers disentangle and re-unite,  
and the serpent dies blasted by human poison.  
Why do the gods labour to empower these spells  
and herbs, fearing to scorn them? What mutual  
pact constrains them? Must they obey, or do they  
delight in doing so? Do they reward some piety  
unknown to us, or do they bow to silent threats?  
Has witchcraft power over all the gods, or are  
these tyrannical spells aimed at one alone, who  
can compel the world as he himself is compelled?  
By them the stars were first plucked down from  
the swift-moving sky, the clear moon likewise  
attacked by the dire ills of incantation, dimmed  
and glowed with a dark terrestrial light, as if  
Earth separated her from her brother's glory,

casting a shadow, obstructing heaven's fires.  
Greatly troubled, she is drawn down by magic,  
until she sheds spume on nearby plants below.

#### **Book VI:507-568 The witch Erictho**

The witch Erictho had scorned these wicked rites and practices of an accursed race, as still insufficient, and had turned her vile arts to rites unknown. It was a crime to her to shelter her evil head under a roof by a city hearth. Dear to the deities of Erebus, she dwelt in deserted tombs, and haunted the graves from which ghosts had been expelled. Neither the gods above, nor that she was one of the living, stopped her overhearing the silent shades, or knowing the Stygian realm, and unseen Dis's mysteries. The witch's face haggard, vile with neglect, her dreadful countenance of a hellish pallor, freighted with uncombed locks, is unknown to the pure heavens above; but when black clouds and tempests drown the stars, she will emerge from empty tombs, and trap nocturnal lightning. Her tread blights the seed in the rich fields, her breath poisons the untainted air. She never prays to heaven, invokes no divine power with suppliant hymn, knows nothing of the sacrificial entrails; she delights in setting funereal fires on the altars, scattering incense snatched from a burning pyre. The gods grant every horror at the first cry of her voice, dreading a second incantation. Living spirits, still in control of their bodies, she buries in the grave, and while fate still owes them years death strikes against their will; or reversing the rite she brings back the dead from the tomb, their corpses escaping to life.

She snatches the charred bones and smoking  
ashes of children from the midst of the pyre,  
and the very torches from their parents' hands;  
She gathers the fragments of the funeral bier,  
and the fluttering grave-clothes turned to ash,  
and the cinders that reek of the corpse. And if  
the dead are sealed in a sarcophagus, that dries  
the internal moisture, absorbs the corruption  
of the marrow-bones, and stiffens the corpse,  
then she vents her anger eagerly on its limbs,  
thrusting her fingers deep in the eye-sockets,  
scooping out the solidified eyeballs in delight,  
gnawing the yellowed nails on withered hands.  
She mangles the hanged corpse, cuts the fatal  
noose with her teeth, scrapes at the crucified,  
tears at rain-beaten flesh and bones scorched  
by the sun. She steals nails that have pierced  
hands, the clotted gore and the black residues  
of putrefaction that oozed over all the limbs;  
and hangs her weight on sinews that resist  
her teeth. She squats by any corpse exposed  
on the ground, before birds or beasts arrive,  
not severing the limbs with her bare hands  
or a knife, but waiting for wolves to tear  
the flesh, ready to snatch the morsels from  
their un-slaked jaws. Nor does she hesitate  
to take life if warm blood's needed that flows  
when a throat is slit, and her ghoulish feasts  
demand still quivering flesh. Thus she pierces  
the womb and extracts the child, not as nature  
intended, in order to set it in the altar flames.  
And when a cruel and forceful ghost is wanted,  
she takes its life herself. Every man's death  
serves her turn. She tears the bloom from the face  
on some youngster's body, her left hand slicing  
a lock of hair from the dying lad's head. Often  
too, when a loved one is buried, the dreadful

witch will hang over the body in kissing it,  
mutilates the head, opens the closed mouth  
with her teeth, bites the tip of the inert tongue  
in the dry mouth, infuses the cold lips with  
murmuring sound, and sends a wicked and  
arcane message down to the Stygian shades.

#### **Book VI:569-623 Sextus seeks her aid**

Sextus heard local tales of Erictho, and made  
his way to her dwelling when night ruled the sky,  
at the hour in those deserted fields when the sun  
is in the zenith for those on the other side of earth.  
Guides, the faithful servants of her wickedness,  
sought her among the empty graves and tombs  
until they saw her far off sitting on a high cliff,  
where the Balkan mountains slope to Pharsalia.  
She was attempting a spell unknown to wizards  
or the powers of wizardry, creating a charm  
for a novel purpose. She feared the armies might  
move to some other site, and Thessaly miss out  
on mighty carnage; so the witch forbade the war  
to shift from Pharsalia, darkened by her spells  
and sprinkled over by her noxious compounds,  
so all the dead would be hers, and all the blood,  
shed there, hers to employ. She hoped to mutilate  
the corpses of slain kings, plunder the ashes of  
the Roman people, and the bones of noblemen,  
and master the ghosts of the great. Her sole  
labour and passion was to snatch what part  
she could of Pompey's outstretched corpse,  
pounce on what of Caesar's limbs she might.  
Pompey's unworthy son spoke first, saying:  
'O famed Thessalian, with the power to reveal  
the future to mortal men, and alter the course  
of events, I pray I might be allowed certain  
knowledge of the outcome of the coming battle.

I am not the least of Romans, a son of renowned Pompey, a lord of the world or the heir to doom. My heart quakes, shaken by uncertainty, yet ready also to face known dangers. Take from events the power to rush upon us suddenly and blindly. Trouble the gods or, abandoning them, extort the truth from the shades below. Reveal the Elysian realms, and summon Death himself: force him to show which among us is his. It is no mean task: yet for your own ends too it is worth your labour to know how the die will fall.' Proud of her great fame, the Thessalian witch replied: 'If it were a lesser decree of fate you sought to change, young man, it would be easy to force the gods to any course you wish. If the planets in their aspects presage death for one alone, our arts can summon a delay. Likewise though all the stars foretell long years, we can cut short a life by the use of magic herbs. But sometimes the chain of events is fixed from the beginning of the world; if we seek to make a change all fates are altered, all humankind is affected by a single blow, and all the Thessalian coven then confess Destiny's greater powers. But if to foreknow events contents you, many and easy the ways to the truth: earth, sky, abyss, the sea, the plains, the cliffs of Rhodope will speak. And since there is a wealth of recent slaughter, the simplest way is to steal a corpse from the Thessalian field; the lips of a fresh cadaver, still warm, will speak loud, not some dismal shade, limbs withered from the sun, gibbering vaguely in our ears.'

## **Book VI:624-666 The cave of Erictho**

So she spoke: then, night doubly darkened by her art,  
her shadowy head veiled in vile mist, she strayed  
among the scattered corpses of dead men denied burial.  
The wolves at once fled, the vultures sheathed their  
talons, and unsated took flight, as the witch picked out  
her prophet, prodding the innermost organs deathly cold  
seeking a corpse, its pair of lungs firm and un-wounded  
whose rigid sacs might still possess power of utterance.  
The fate of a multitude of slain now hangs in the balance:  
which will she choose to restore to life? If she had tried  
to raise up a whole army on that plain, to fight once more,  
the laws of Erebus would have rested in abeyance, a host  
brought from Stygian Avernus by her monstrous powers  
would have warred again. Finally, she chose a cadaver  
thrusting a hook through a noose tied around its neck,  
then dragging the wretched corpse, doomed to live again,  
along over rocks, through scree, to her lair under a high  
cliff of that cavernous mountain, which cruel Erictho  
had destined for her rites. There the ground fell in sheer  
descent to well-nigh reach the invisible caverns of Dis.  
Dark trees with bowed branches hemmed it in, yew-trees  
the sunlight never penetrated, their tips shunning the sky.  
Within the caves, faint shadows and pallid decay reigned  
in endless night; no light illuminating them but by magic.  
Even in Taenarus' gorge the air is less stagnant; here was  
the gloomy border of the unseen world and ours; so that  
the gods of Tartarus had no fear in allowing the dead there.  
For though the Thessalian witch has power over the fates,  
it is uncertain whether she questions the dead souls by  
drawing them to her, or descending to them. Now, she  
donned diverse and multi-coloured raiment fit for a fiend  
to wear, threw back her hair and revealed her face, tying  
her dreadful locks with wreathed vipers. Seeing Sextus'  
companions trembling with dread and he himself afraid,  
seeing their fixed glaze and bloodless features, she cried:

‘Set aside the fears your fearful minds conceive; now life in familiar shape will return to him, so that even the fearful might hear him speak. Though I were to show the pools of Styx whose shores roar with flame, though my commands let you view the Kindly Ones, or Cerberus shaking his snaky mane, or the chained forms of the Giants, why, cowards, fear those shades, who themselves fear me?’

### **Book VI:667-718 Erictho invokes the infernal powers**

Then she began by filling fresh wounds in the breast of that corpse with warm blood, washing the innards clean of gore pouring into them moon-born poison. In this was mingled all that Nature wrongly bears; the spume of rabid dogs, a lynx’s innards, a foul hyena’s hump, and the marrow of a snake-fed stag; the *remora* was there, that *echeneis*, that grips ships holding them motionless mid-ocean though the wind fills their sails; and the eyes of dragons, and the stones that sound when warmed by a nesting eagle; the flying snake of Arabia, and the viper born beside the Red Sea that guards pearl-oysters; the skin the horned Libyan snake will shed while alive; the ashes of the Phoenix that immolates itself in the flames of the eastern altar. To which she added commonly-known baneful weeds, and leaves steeped with unspeakable spells, and herbs her own deadly mouth had spat upon at birth, with all the venom she herself had given to the world. Then her voice, more powerful than any herb to bewitch the powers of Lethe, began to utter dissonant cries, far different from any human speech. The dog’s yowl, the wolf’s howl, were there, the restless barn-owl’s hoot, and the screech-owl’s call, beasts’ wails and shrieks, the hissing of snakes, they were all expressed within; and the roar of waves beating on rocks, the forest’s moan, the thunder through a rift in the cloud, all such things formed that single voice. Next she began

a Thessalian spell, in accents that penetrated Tartarus:  
'You Furies, and you Stygian horrors, you torments  
of the guilty, and you, Chaos, ready to confound  
innumerable worlds in ruin; and you, ruler of the world  
below, a god whom lingering Death torments through  
long centuries; and Styx, and that Elysium no Thessalian  
witch deserves; and Persephone who shuns her mother  
in heaven; and the third form of our patroness, Hecate,  
through whom the shades and I converse silently;  
and the Janitor of the wide realm, who throws men's  
flesh to the savage hound; and the Sisters who must  
re-spin the thread of life; and you, ancient ferryman  
of the fiery wave, weary of rowing shades back to me:  
hear my prayer! If I invoke you with sufficiently foul  
and impious lips; if I never chant these spells fasting  
from human flesh; if I have often slit open those breasts  
filled with divinity, and laved them with warm brains;  
if any infant whose head and organs were laid on your  
platters might prevail with you, grant me my request.  
I do not ask for one who lurks in the depths of Tartarus,  
long accustomed to the dark, but for some descending  
spirit fleeing the light; one who clings to the threshold  
still of gloomy Orcus, who obeying my spells now will  
only go down once among the shades. If this civil war  
deserves your favour, let the shade of some Pompeian,  
lately among us, prophesy all things to Pompey's son.'

#### **Book VI:719-774 She raises the dead to prophesy**

With this, foaming at the mouth, she raised her head  
to find the shade of the unburied dead close beside her.  
It feared the lifeless corpse, the loathsome confinement  
of its former prison; it shrank from entering the gaping  
breast, the flesh and innards ruined by the mortal wound.  
Oh wretched ghost, iniquitously robbed of death's final  
gift, that is: to die no more! Erichtho marvelled that fate  
could be delayed so, and enraged by the dead she lashed



the inert corpse with a live serpent, and through the clefts where the earth had been split by her spells she growled like a dog at the shades below and shattering the silence of their realm, cried: 'Tisiphone and Megaera, unheeding of my voice, will you not drive the unhappy spirit with your cruel whips from the void of Erebus? Or shall I summon you by your secret names, Hounds of Hell, and render you helpless in the light above; there to keep you from graves and funerals; banish you from tombs, drive you from urns of the dead. And you, Hecate, all pale and withered in form, who paint your face before you visit the gods above, I will show them you as you are, and prevent you altering your hellish form. I shall speak aloud about that food which confines Proserpine beneath the vast weight of earth above, by what compact she loves the gloomy king of darkness, what defilement she suffered such that you Ceres would not recall her. I shall burst your caves asunder, Ruler of the Underworld, and admit light instantly to blast you. Will you obey me? Or shall I call on one at the sound of whose name earth ever quakes and trembles, who views the Gorgon's head without its veil, who lashes the cowering Fury with her own whip, who dwells in Tartarus beyond your sight, for whom you are the gods above, who swears by Styx while perjuring himself.' Instantly the clotted blood grew warm, heating the livid wounds, coursing through veins and extremities of the limbs. The vital organs, stirred, thrilled in the cold flesh; and a new life stealing through the numbed innards contested with death. Each limb quivered, sinews strained, and the dead man rose, not limb by limb, but bounding up, swiftly, and at once standing erect. His mouth gaped wide, his eyes opened, not with the aspect of one living as yet, but already half-alive. Pallor and rigidity remaining, he was dazed by his restoration to this world. And the fettered mouth uttered no sound: a voice and tongue were granted him but only for reply. 'Speak as I command,' the witch cried, 'and great will be your reward, for if you speak true

I shall render you immune to Thessalian arts for all time;  
I will burn your body on such a pyre and with such fuel,  
with such Stygian chanting, that your spirit shall be deaf  
to all sorcerers' spells. Let it be worth that to live again:  
and once I again grant you death no herb or spell shall  
break your long Lethean sleep. Riddling prophecies may  
suit the priests and tripods of the gods; but you must let  
any man who seeks truth from the shades, brave enough  
to approach the oracles of fierce death, depart in certainty.  
Do not begrudge this, I pray: give acts a name and place,  
yield a voice through which fate may reveal itself to me.'

### **Book VI:775-830 The prophecy of the dead**

Then she cast a spell that gave the shade power to know  
all that she asked. The sad flesh spoke, its tears flowing:  
'Summoned from the high bank of the silent river, I saw  
nothing of the Fates' mournful spinning, but this I was  
able to learn from the host of shades: that savage strife  
stirs the Roman ghosts, impious war shatters the peace  
of the infernal regions. The great Romans, from diverse  
sides, came from Elysian realms and gloomy Tartarus.  
They made clear what fate intends. The blessed dead  
wore sorrowful faces. I saw the Decii, father and son,  
lives purified in battle, Camillus and Curius, weeping;  
and Sulla railing against you, Fortune. Scipio grieved  
that his unhappy scion should fall on Libyan soil; Cato  
the Censor, a still fiercer enemy of Carthage mourned  
the death his descendant would prefer to slavery. Among  
all the pious shades I saw only you, Brutus, rejoicing,  
you, Rome's first consul after the tyrants were deposed.  
But threatening Catiline, snapped and broke his chains,  
and was exulting, with fierce Marius and bare-armed  
Cethegus; and I saw Drusus the demagogue and rash  
legislator, joyful, and the Gracchi, the greatly daring.  
Hands, bound by eternal links of steel in Dis's prison,  
clapped with delight, and the wicked sought the plains

of the blessed. The lord of that bloodless realm threw wide his pallid realm, and with steep jagged cliffs and harsh steel for chains prepared his punishment for the victorious. Sextus, take consolation in this: the dead look to welcome your father and his house to a place of peace, keeping a bright region of their realm for them. Let no short-lived victory trouble you: cometh the hour that makes all generals equal. You proud, with your high hearts, hasten to die, then descend from so pitiful a grave to trample on the ghosts of the deified Romans. By whose grave the Nile or by whose the Tiber will flow, is in question, yet the conflict of generals only settles their place of burial: of your own fate seek nothing, the fates will tell you without my saying, since your father, Sextus, a surer prophet will tell you all in the land of Sicily, though even he is unsure of where to summon you to, or what to warn you of, what regions, what climes he ought to order you to avoid. Fear Europe, Africa, and Asia wretched house! Fortune divides your graves among the continents you triumphed over. O ill-fated ones, finding nowhere in the world safer than Pharsalia!’ So ending his prophecy, he stood there sorrowful with silent face, ready to die again. Herbs and magic spells were once more needed before the cadaver could fall, since death having exerted all its power once, could not reclaim that spirit itself. Then the witch built a tall pyre of wood; and the dead man approached the fire. Erictho left him to stretch out on the burning pile, allowing him to die at last. She accompanied Sextus to his father’s camp as the sky took on the hue of dawn, but at her order night held back day producing a veil of darkness for them till they set foot in safety among the tents.

## **End of Book VI**

## **Book VII:1-44 Pompey's dream**

A baleful Sun rose from Ocean, slow to answer the summons of the eternal law, driving his steeds more fiercely than ever against the revolution of the sky, urging his course backwards though the heavens whirled him on, and ready to suffer eclipse and the loss of his light, drawing cloud to him, not to feed his flames but to prevent his clear rays falling on Thessalian lands. That darkness, marking the end of his life's happiness, troubled Pompey's care-filled sleep with idle phantoms. He thought he sat in his own theatre, viewing the ghostly multitudes of Rome; and his name was lifted to the heavens in shouts of joy, and all the tiers of seats sounded his praise. Such the crowd's aspect, such their loud applause in his younger years, at his second triumph, after he had subdued those tribes the Ebro borders, defeating every force the elusive Sertorius threw against him, and brought peace to the west. Now he sat, cheered by senators while as yet no more than a Roman knight, but no less adored in his white robe than in that which adorns the triumphal car. Perhaps, fearful of the future and the ending of prosperity, his dreams took refuge in happier days; perhaps sleep, as often, presaged in her windings his dream's opposite, foretold a mighty lamentation; or Fortune showed him Rome so, because he would be denied a last sight of his homeland. Let the night-watch not break his sleep, nor the trumpet's blare beat against his ear. Tomorrow's sleep will be haunted, by sad images of the day, always the fatal field, always war. Would that the Romans might have found such sleep, blessed by such a night. Happy your Rome, Pompey, if she had but seen you even in dream! One day at least the gods should have granted you and your homeland, where knowing your fate both might have taken a last delight in your mutual love. You left Italy thinking to die in Rome, and Rome, finding her prayers for you endlessly answered, could never have believed such darkness might cling to fate, unable even to bury her beloved Pompey, thus. Young and old, united in grief, would have wept, and children without prompting,

and the multitude of women would have loosed their hair,  
scarified their breasts as when Brutus himself was buried.  
Even now, though men fear the victorious tyrant's spear,  
though Caesar himself declare you dead, they will weep,  
while offering incense and laurel wreaths to the Thunderer.  
O wretched people, whose groans swallow up their tears,  
unable to gather and mourn you in your crowded theatre!

### **Book VII:45-86 Cicero's speech**

As daylight eclipsed the stars, the camps on both sides raised a confused murmur, and with the fates dragging the world to ruin, the soldiers sought the sign for battle. Most of that wretched throng were destined not to see the day out, yet they crowded round their leaders' tents, muttering; in heat and vast disorder they hastened the hour of imminent death. A dire frenzy gripped them; each eager to bring on his own and his country's fate. Calling Pompey tardy and cowardly, and too merciful to his father-in-law, they cry he has been seduced by worldly power, wishing to hold too many sundry nations to his rule, and mistrustful of peace. Indeed the kings of the east and their armies detained far from their own lands, complain that the war drags on. O gods, do you delight, when you decide to overthrow all things, in adding rank perversity to our errors? We rush upon disaster, and call for battles that will ruin us, as in Pompey's camp they begged for Pharsalia. There the greatest of Rome's orators, Cicero, articulated all the protests of the multitude; Cicero, whose civil authority caused savage Catiline to dread the power of peace; Cicero, hating war, so long muzzled by military service, who longed for the Forum and the rostrum. His eloquence seconded an unsound cause: 'Pompey, in return for all her favours to you, Fortune makes one request, that you make use of her, while we, the captains of your army, with the kings you created, and a whole suppliant world beg you to humble Caesar. Shall your father-in-law be an endless source of war for humankind? Nations you conquered as you hastened past

have a right to resent your slowness to conquer now. Where is your fervour, where is your faith in your star? Ungrateful man, do you doubt the heavens, or fear to entrust the gods with the Senate's cause? The soldiers themselves will raise your standards and attack: you should blush at being forced to conquer. If the war is waged on our behalf, we who asked you to lead us, then let us battle on whatever field we wish. Why keep a host of sword-tips from tasting Caesar's blood? They shake their weapons, and can hardly wait for the signal you delay. Make haste, or your own trumpets will outrun you. The senators would know, Pompey, do they follow you as combatants or mere companions?' The general groaned, he feeling the gods were false, that fate ran counter to his wish.

### **Book VII:87-130 Pompey's reply**

'If this is what all desire,' he answered, 'if the hour demands Pompey the soldier, not the statesman, I will defy fate no longer. Let Fortune involve the nations in common downfall, and let this light be the last for the best part of mankind. Yet I bear witness, Rome, that this day of universal destruction, is forced upon me. The labour of war might have left Rome unwounded; I could have won a bloodless victory, handed Caesar, a captive, to the peaceful land he violated. What evil madness is this, what blindness! Men ready to wage civil war yet fear to win a bloodless victory! Have we not wrenched the land from enemy hands, and expelled them utterly from the seas, forced their starving ranks to steal the un-ripened corn, made them pray instead to be slain by the sword and mingle their vanquished dead with ours? This war is half-won already if my recruits have no fear of battle, if indeed the spur of emulation and the fieriness of their ardour makes them seek the signal for action. Yet many men are driven to the heights of danger by a mere dread of imminent death. He is truly brave who is prompt to endure the threat if it is close, but willing also to delay. It seems we must hand our present good fortune to chance,

and let the sword decide a world's fate; they would rather see a leader fight than conquer. Fortune, you granted me the Roman state to rule: accept it now, greater yet than I received it, and defend it in the blindness of war. Battle will bring Pompey neither glory nor reproach. Caesar, your wicked prayers to the gods prevail over mine: we shall fight. What evil and suffering this day will bring the nations! How many kingdoms will be ruined! How dark Enipeus will flow with Roman blood. Let the first spear hurled in this fateful war take my life, if my death were without moment, and our cause undefeated; to me victory is no more welcome than ruin. When today's carnage is over, Pompey's name will be one for nations either to hate or pity: for the conquered will suffer every evil that final destruction brings, the conqueror commit every wickedness.' With this, he ordered the men to arms, and loosed the reins of their furious ardour, in the same way that a ship's captain, defeated by the storm's power, his arts useless, yields the tiller to the wind, swept along an ignominious burden. The camp hummed to a confused and hasty tumult, as fierce hearts throbbed to the uncertain beat within their breasts. The pallor of imminent death was on many faces, and their aspect the image of doom.

### **Book VII:131-184 Preparations and omens**

The day had come which would decide the fate of mankind for centuries to come, and this battle determine clearly what Rome was to be. Each man ignored his own danger, struck by greater dread. Who could be selfish in his fear witness to widespread destruction, the shore drowned by the ocean, waves above mountain crests, the sun displaced, the sky lowering over earth? Now men are not free to tremble for themselves: they fear for Rome and Pompey. Now soldiers only trust to their swords once the whetted blades strike fire from the grindstones; now every lance is sharpened on stone, bows are re-strung with stronger cord, the quivers carefully

filled with choice arrows. Now the cavalryman lengthens his spurs and checks the reins and bridle. Likewise, if I might compare the actions of men and gods, likewise when Phlegra witnessed the Giants' fury, Mars's sword was heated on Etna's anvil, Neptune's trident glowed in the fire for a second time, Apollo re-forged those arrow-heads that undid Python's coils, Pallas Minerva spread the Gorgon's viperous tresses over her aegis, and the Cyclopes struck new lightning-bolts for Jove. Now Fortune too did not hesitate to reveal the future by diverse signs. When the army made for Thessaly's fields, the whole sky opposed their march, hurling meteors against them, columns of flame, whirlwinds sucking up water and trees together, blinding their eyes with lightning, striking crests from their helmets, melting the swords in their scabbards, tearing spears from their grasp while fusing them, their evil blades smoking with air-borne sulphur. The standards too could barely be plucked from the soil, their great weight bowing the heads of the standard-bearers; and the standards wept real tears, for until Pharsalia, they had signified Rome and the State. Then a bull, readied for sacrifice overturned the altar, and fled headlong into the fields of Thessaly, so there was no victim for the ill-omened rite. Yet you, Caesar, what evil deities below, what Furies did you invoke with your rites? What powers of the Stygian realm, what horrors of Hell, what savagery steeped in night, and your prayer heard, though soon to wage impious and cruel war! Now whether deceived by portents or their own excessive fears many believed they saw Pindus strike Olympus, the Balkan range subsiding into its deep valleys, Pharsalia uttering the sounds of night battles, while lake Boebeis by Ossa turned red with blood. Men gazed in wonder at each other's faces veiled with mist, at the pallid light, the darkness brooding above their helmets, at phantoms of their dead



fathers and kin flickering to and fro before their eyes. This alone brought solace to the minds of that host, conscious of their own wicked desire to pierce some father's or brother's throat, delighting in the portents, a belief that this tumult in their minds, this sudden ferment, was an omen of success in their wickedness.

### **Book VII:185-214 The augur's cry**

If it is granted to men's minds to foreknow misfortune, what wonder those whose last day loomed quaked with intense fear! Every Roman, whether there in Phoenician Cadiz, or in Armenia drinking the Araxes' water, in all climes and beneath every constellation of the heavens, every Roman sorrowed, and knew not why, and chided himself for his sadness; not realising what loss he was suffering there and then in Thessaly. If one may credit the legend, an augur, in the Euganean hills, that day, sitting by the Aponus spring that smokes as it issues from the ground, where Antenor's Timavus river splits into channels, cried out: 'The great day dawns, the final battle is waged; the armies of Caesar and Pompey meet in impious war.' Perhaps he heard the thunder and saw Jove's omen, the lightning bolt; perhaps he witnessed all the firmament at war, the sky troubled on its axle; or else the sad powers above marked the battle, the sun dim and obscured. Nature at least ensured that the day of Pharsalia differed from all others that she displays. And if skilled augurs through human wit had viewed every strange sign above, Pharsalia might have been known the whole world over. How great those leaders whose fates were signalled throughout earth, to whose destiny the heavens in their entirety gave their attention! Even for posterity, in generations to come, these things will excite hope and fear and vain prayer, when the tale of that battle is read, whether its own fame shall descend to later centuries, or whether I by my care and effort might

do some service to those great men; all will be spellbound when they read as if the outcome were yet to be decided and not known, and will favour your cause Pompey, yet.

### **Book VII:215-234 Pompey deploys his army**

Pompey's soldiers, illuminated by the sun's opposing rays, descending from the hills, flooded them with light. Not launched randomly at the plain, the doomed ranks were placed in definite order. Lentulus Spinther, you held the left, with the first legion, the readiest for war, and the fourth. The right wing of the host was entrusted to you, Domitius Ahenobarbus, a brave but ill-starred captain. While the strong centre of the battle line was formed of the bravest men, whom you Scipio Metellus had led from Cilicia, here a combatant, but later to hold the high command in Africa. And by Enipeus' waters and marshy pools rode the riders from the Cappadocian hills, and the loose-reined cavalry from Pontus. Most of the dry ground was held by the kings, and tetrarchs, and mighty potentates, and all wearers of purple who served the power of Rome. Libya sent Numidians there, Crete her Cydonians, there the arrows of the Itureans were fired, the Gauls marched out against their known foe, and there the Spaniards brandished battle-shields, that Pompey might rob the victor of his subject nations, and at once consume the source of all future triumphs by exhausting in one battle the blood of all mankind!

### **Book VII:235-302 Caesar addresses his men**

That day by chance, Caesar, relinquishing his position, was about to disperse his troops to plunder the fields, when he saw the enemy suddenly descend to the plain. Before him lay his opportunity, the object of a thousand prayers, to stake all on a single throw. Tired of delay, and burning with desire for regal power, he had learned,

in the short space of civil war, to loathe this slow-wrought crime. Yet when he felt the advent of that decisive battle, which would resolve their rivalry, when he saw the ruins of fate tottering to their fall, even his rage for instant slaughter languished for a moment, and his mind ready to vouch success wavered, how should fear for his own fate not exist, nor the possibility of Pompey's hopes? Fear subsiding, confidence returned, the better to exhort his troops: 'Conquerors of the world, you soldiers who are my fortune, here is the battle you so often wished for. Prayer is no longer needed, now summon fate with your swords. Caesar's greatness lies in your hands. This is the day I recall that you promised me by the Rubicon, the hope of which led us to take up arms, for which we delayed our return to the triumphs denied us. This is the day witnessed by fate that will decide which of us was right to take up arms; this battle will pronounce the defeated guilty. You who attacked your native land with fire and steel for me, fight fiercely, and absolve yourselves of sin now with the sword. In the shifting claims of warfare, no hand is pure. Not for my fortune I pray but that you might be free to rule all nations. I desire myself to return to private life, wear plebeian dress, be a mere civilian: while you rule all I'll refuse nothing. Reign, while I gaze on with envy. Nor will the world you hope for cost much in blood: you meet lads culled from the Greek training-grounds, sapped by the practices of the wrestling-ring, scarce strong enough to bear arms; and barbarians in disordered dissonant ranks, unable to endure the trumpet-blast or the sound of their own marching. Few of you will face other Romans; most of this fighting will thin the world of nations and crush the enemies of Rome. Attack these cowardly tribes and infamous kingdoms, lay a world low with the first stroke of your blades; make clear that the many who followed Pompey's chariot to Rome, cannot deliver him a single triumph.

Do Armenians care who holds the power in Rome?  
Would some barbarian give a single drop of blood  
to grant Pompey power in Italy? They hate all Romans  
and disdain their masters; those they know, the most.  
Fortune has rather entrusted me to the hands of my  
own men, whom I know from many a battle in Gaul.  
What blade do I not recognise? And when the javelin  
flies quivering through the sky, I shall not fail to name  
the arm that throws it. If I see those signs that never yet  
played your leader false, fierce face and menacing gaze,  
victory is yours. I think to see rivers of blood, kings all  
trampled as one underfoot, the mangled flesh of senators,  
whole nations drowned in one vast carnage. But I delay  
my destiny, holding you here while you rage for battle.  
Forgive my tardiness, unsettled by hope I have never  
felt the gods so close or ready to grant so much; only  
this narrow field keeps us from what we pray for. I  
am the man, who when this fight is done, will have  
the power to grant what belongs to nations and kings.  
What movement of the heavens, what constellation  
shifting in the sky grants this to Thessaly, you gods?

### **Book VII:303-336 Caesar launches the attack**

Today before us is this war's punishment or reward.  
Imagine the chains, imagine the cross reserved for  
Caesar, my head set on the Rostrum, limbs unburied.  
Think of Sulla's crime, the butchery in the Saepta's  
pound on the Campus Martius: we wage civil war  
on Sulla's pupil. My fears are for you; I shall seek  
my own salvation in suicide; whoever looks back  
if the foe is unbeaten, will see me stab my breast.  
You gods, whose cares are drawn from heaven to  
earth by Rome's travails, give victory to one who  
does not think it needful to draw cruel blades on  
beaten men, nor thinks citizens commit a crime  
merely by fighting him! When Pompey held you

fast, where your power was constrained, he then sated his sword with streams of blood! This I beg of you, my soldiers, let every fugitive pass as your countryman, strike no man in the back. Yet while their weapons glitter, no pious thought, no sight of relatives in their front rank must move you; strike confusion into every face you once revered. If any man strikes a kinsman's breast with the cruel steel, let him accept the guilt, or if he violates no tie of kinship with the blow let him do so for the death of his unknown foe. Level the ramparts now and fill the trenches with their ruins, so the whole army may advance in ranks, in tight formation. Forget the camp, you will find another in that place from which their doomed army comes.' Almost before Caesar ended, each man took up his task, snatching food, and arming in haste. Taking it as an omen of victory, they trampled the ramparts, exiting in confusion, belying their orders, and leaving all to fate. If every man there, entering that deadly field had been Caesar and seeking to rule Rome, they could not have flung themselves faster into the fray.

### **Book VII:337-384 Pompey addresses his men**

When Pompey saw the enemy army advance directly, to further the battle without delay, he stood appalled, his blood froze, knowing this day chosen by the gods. It was an omen to so great a soldier to so dread a battle. But swallowing his fears he rode along the line on his great war-horse. 'Behold the day,' he cried, 'that your virtue demanded, the end of the civil war you sought. Expend all your strength; one last trial of arms is left; a single hour that draws all nations here. Whoever longs for his house and homeland, his wife, children, dear ones left behind, must wield the sword: heaven sets all on this one battle. Ours, the better cause, gives hope of the gods' favour: they will guide our spears

to Caesar's heart, they wish to sanctify Rome's laws with his blood. If they chose to grant my father-in-law the command of the world, they could hasten this grey head of mine into the grave: but if they let Pompey lead they cannot be angry with Rome or the nations. We have assembled all, to make victory ours. Noble men willingly face danger, so that our army has the sacred aspect of former times, such that Curius, and Camillus, and the Decii, those lives devoted to death, if the fates had restored them to our times, would stand beside us. The nations of the eastern dawn, of countless cities, are gathered, such hosts as never were summoned before. A whole world at once is for us. Whoever is bounded by the zodiac to north and south make up our army, and shall we not encircle the enemy forces, outflank them with our wings? Victory demands but few to fight, mere shouting is all the rest of our army requires to do: Caesar's force is not enough for us. Imagine Rome's mothers leaning with dishevelled hair from the high walls of the city urging you to battle; imagine those aged senators prevented from fighting by their years, bowing their venerable grey heads before you; that Rome herself fearful of tyranny comes to greet you; imagine that present generations and those to come both address their prayers to you: the latter desiring to be born free, the former to die in freedom. If with such at stake, there is still room for Pompey, then with my wife and sons, I would kneel at your feet in supplication, if that were in accord with the majesty of my command. Except you conquer, Pompey is exiled, scorned by Caesar, bringing shame on you, and I pray to escape that final misery, in my closing years, and not learn, an old man, to bear the yoke.' Ending thus, his mournful voice stirred their valour, Roman courage rose, and they resolved to win or die.

## **Book VII:385-459 The effects of Pharsalia**

So the armies ran forward both roused by the same ardour,  
one driven by fear of domination, the other to achieve it.  
Those right hands guaranteed, that whatever this ninth  
century from Rome's foundation might reveal, it would  
be emptied of swordsmen. This war would deny birth  
to a generation, and prevent the birth of unborn nations.  
Thus the whole Latin race would seem a fable; Gabii,  
Veii, Cora, the hearths of Alba, houses of Laurentum,  
barely revealed by dust-drowned ruins, an empty land,  
where no men go but senators forced by Numa's law,  
which they resent, to spend the statutory night there.  
It was not the tooth of time brought such destruction,  
consigned the past monuments to decay; in all those  
silent towns we witness the abomination of civil war.  
How the numbers of the human race were lessened!  
Those born into the world are not enough to populate  
those towns and country, a single city contains us all.  
The fields of Italy are tilled by men in chains, no one  
lives beneath our ancient roofs, rotten and set to fall;  
Rome is not peopled by citizens; full of the world's  
dross we have so ruined her, civil war among such  
is no longer a threat. Pharsalia was the cause of all  
that evil. Those deathly names, Cannae and Allia,  
so long accursed in the Roman calendar, must yield  
to this. Rome marks the date of lesser disasters, yet  
chooses to ignore this day. Cruel destiny! Plague  
bearing air, pestilence, famine that maddens, cities  
given to the flames, tremors levelling populous  
townships, all these might be sated with the men  
Fate drew from every quarter to wretched death,  
snatching away the gifts of years while revealing  
them, displaying generals and nations in the field,  
to show Rome in collapse what greatness also fell.  
What city ruled a broader empire or hastened from  
success to success more swiftly? Every war added

more subjects, every year the sun saw you advance towards the poles; other than a small part of the East, night, day, all the heavens revolved for you, Rome, and all the wandering stars saw was yours. And yet Pharsalia's fatal dawn reversed your fate, and undid the work of centuries. Thanks to that blood-drenched day, India has no fear of Roman law, no consul makes the nomad Dahae live behind walls, or with girt robe founds a colony in Sarmatia, tracing it with the plough; Pharsalia is why Parthia still awaits stern retribution, that Liberty, fleeing civil war, has not returned from beyond the Tigris or the Rhine, and often though we have sought her with our life-blood, wanders, a boon to Scythians and Germans, and never turns her eye to Italy, would she had never been known to our race. From the day Romulus founded you, Rome, marked by the flight of a vulture on the left, and peopled you with the criminals from the sanctuary in the Asylum, down to the disaster of Pharsalia, you should have stayed a slave. Fortune, I complain to you of the Bruti; why did we enjoy lawful rule, years named for consuls? Happy the Arabs, Medes, the lands of the East, whom destiny granted endlessly to tyrants. Of all the nations under tyranny our fate is the worst, to whom slavery is shame. No deities aid us, we lie when we say Jove reigns, since it is blind chance drives the world along. Would a Jupiter grasping the lightning-bolt gaze idly from high heaven at Pharsalia's slaughter? Would he aim his fires at Pholoe and Oeta, the pines of Mimas, and Rhodope's blameless forest, yet Cassius, not he, strike Caesar down? He brought night to Thyestes, in dooming Argos to a premature darkness, shall he then leave Thessaly in the light where, an equal crime, fathers and brothers wield swords against each other? No god watches over mankind. Yet we have vengeance for that disaster insofar as gods can satisfy us mortals: this civil war would make gods equal to those above;



Rome would deck the spirits of the dead with haloes,  
with lightning-bolts and stars, and here, in the temples  
of the gods, Romans swear their oaths by their shades.

### **Book VII:460-505 Battle is joined**

When both armies had swiftly crossed the open ground  
that lay between them and that final act of destiny, and  
were only separated by a little space, each man looked  
to see where his javelin might fall, or whose arm fate  
might raise to threaten him. There they could see fathers'  
and brothers' faces opposite, weapons at their side, yet  
chose to hold position. But their blood ran cold, torpor  
seized them, numbed at the heart from that blow to all  
natural affection, and whole companies grasped their  
motionless javelins in a rigid grip. And may the gods  
grant you, Cratinus, whose spear-blow began the battle,  
staining Thessaly with Roman blood, not mere death,  
which lies in store for all, but the pains beyond death.  
What mad rashness! When Caesar restrained his spear,  
had any other hand the precedence? Then the clarions  
gave a strident blast, a horn sounded out the war-note,  
the trumpets bold to give the signal, then a roar rose  
to the heavens, breaking on the dome of far Olympus,  
above the clouds, where no sound of thunder reaches.  
The Haemus range's echoing gorges took up the cry  
and passed it onwards for Pelion's caverns to repeat.  
Pindus growled, and the Pangaeian rocks resounded,  
while Oeta's cliffs bellowed, till all were terrified by  
that sound of wild voices returned by Mother Earth.  
Innumerable spears were thrown, with differing aim;  
some hoping to wound, some to bury the spearhead  
in the ground and keep their hands unstained. But  
chance rules all, and random fortune renders guilty  
whom it will. The Ituraeans, Medes and lone Arabs,  
formidable with the bow, firing at no specific mark,  
aimed only at the sky over the battlefield, and death

rained down, but no guilt stained their foreign steel,  
all evil was confined to the Roman javelins. The air  
was thick with metal, the gloom of the interweaving  
weapons masked the plain. But the least part of that  
slaughter was due to the flying metal hurled or fired!  
The sword alone could satisfy the civil war's hatreds,  
drawing right hands towards the hearts of Romans.  
Pompey's forces packed in close ranks, linked arms,  
shield-boss after shield-boss, in an unbroken line;  
with barely space where they stood to move hand  
or weapon, so crowded they feared their own swords.  
Caesar's force, with wild and headlong speed, charged  
the dense ranks, finding a way through shields and men;  
where the woven mail presents its heavy links, where  
the breast is protected by the armour, even to the vitals,  
all that lies beneath, the blows they delivered penetrated.  
One army suffers this civil war that a second one inflicts:  
swords hang idle there in Pompey's ranks, while each  
guilty blade of Caesar's grows hot. And Fortune, now,  
needing no great space of time to overturn so weighty  
a force, sweeps away that vast ruin in its fatal flow.

#### **Book VII:506-544 Caesar destroys Pompey's cavalry**

When Pompey's two cavalry wings extended their arc  
over the plain beyond the flanks of infantry, his light  
troops pushed on in loose order into the opposing men,  
and launched fierce attacks against Caesar's front ranks.  
Each soldier wielded his usual weapons, all alike after  
Roman blood, with flights of arrows, brands and stones,  
and weighted bullets melted and fused by their passage.  
But Caesar, fearing his vanguard might be broken, sent  
the cohorts in reserve, positioned at an angle to his lines  
behind the standards, into attack, while the wings waited,  
against that part of the battlefield where all was in chaos.  
Pompey's cavalry fled headlong, in shameless cowardice,  
showing the folly of entrusting civil conflict to barbarians.

As the first warhorse, pierced in the chest, threw its rider headlong and trampled on his body, the rest fled the field, their horses charging, a dense mass, into their own ranks. Countless deaths ensued, a slaughter not a battle, as here the steel blades waged war, and there the throats were cut. Caesar's army tired of killing all those men facing death. Would that Pharsalia's plain might have been content with the blood of foreigners, theirs the gore that stained her springs, their corpses the covering for her battlefield! Or that, desiring to be glutted with Roman blood, she might spare Galatian lives, and those of the Syrians, Cappadocians, Gauls, Iberians from afar, Armenians Cilicians, for when the war was ended these would form the Roman people. Panic, now spread to all Pompey's force, and fate declared itself for Caesar.

#### **Book VII:545-596 Caesar seizes victory**

It was now the turn of Pompey's centre, his main strength. The fight which had raged at random over the whole field was here concentrated, and fortune checked Caesar's attack. Those who plied arms and waged war there were not men drawn as auxiliaries from foreign armies; here men faced fathers and brothers. Here, Caesar, your fury was revealed, your madresses, your crimes! Would that my mind might shun these acts of war, give them to darkness, that no age might learn from me, in verse, of such horrors, or the full depths of civil conflict. Far better that our tears and groans were in vain, and that I were silent as to your part, Rome! For Caesar, rousing his soldiers' madness and fury, went here and there among the lines, adding fire to their burning ardour, so that nowhere was free of guilt. He noted whose blade was all blood, whose glittered with only its tip red, whose sword-hand trembled, whose grip on his spear was firm, whose was slack, who delighted in warfare, and who merely obeyed orders, whose countenance changed when he killed a countryman. He surveyed the bodies fallen on

the battlefield, with his own hand staunching the wounds that would else have drained the blood of many a soldier. Like Bellona brandishing the blood-stained scourge, or like Mars urging on the Bistones, lashing his horses with savage blows as they run in fear of Pallas and her aegis, so wherever Caesar goes darkness of crime and slaughter loom, groaning of great voices, heavy sounds of armour falling, and the blows of steel against steel. His the hands that grant fresh blades, new missiles, commanding that they hack with swords the faces of the foe. He himself leads the advance and, urging on the stragglers, rouses the laggards with blows from the butt-end of his spear. Telling them to spare the rank and file, he points out to them the senators, knowing the arteries of the state, the heart of power, how to strike at Rome, and where Liberty might be wounded, making her last stand here. Senators, knights and noblemen are put to the sword; The Lepidi and Metelli are slain, the Corvini, the house of Torquatus, once leaders of the state, ruling all men Pompey, except only you. And, oh, why are you there, Marcus Junius Brutus, sword in hand, hiding your face from the enemy under a common soldier's helm? Glory of Rome, the Senate's final hope, last scion of a house famous throughout our history, do not charge so rashly through the enemy ranks, seeking your doom before Philippi, your own Pharsalia. To aim at Caesar's life is useless here: he has not reached the summit yet, not risen far enough beyond those lawful heights of human power that constrain all, to earn of fate so noble a death. Let him live, to fall to Brutus' dagger, let him reign!

### **Book VII:597-646 'A whole world died'**

There all the glory of our country perished: a great pile of noble corpses, unmixed with common soldiers lay there on that field. Yet one death was most noteworthy in that carnage, that of Domitius, the stubborn warrior,

whom fate led from defeat to defeat, never absent when Pompey's fortunes faded. Conquered so often by Caesar, still he died here without loss of his liberty. Thus he fell to a host of wounds, glad not to suffer a second pardon. Caesar found him weltering in a pool of blood, taunting him: 'Domitius, my successor in Gaul, now you desert Pompey's cause; yet the war will go on without you.' So he spoke, but the courage still beating in Domitius' breast sufficed for speech; in dying he opened his lips: 'The fatal reward for your crimes, is not yet yours, Caesar! Knowing your fate is undecided, and your inferiority to your son-in-law, I go free, untroubled, to the Stygian shades, with Pompey still my leader. Though I die, I yet can hope that you, submerged by savage conflict, will pay Pompey and myself a heavy reckoning.' Before he could speak again, life left him, and a deep darkness veiled his eyes. When a whole world died there, it seems shameful to spend tears on each of the innumerable dead, follow individual fates to ask whose vital organs the death-dealing sword penetrated, who trampled on his own bloody entrails, who facing his enemy pulled the buried blade from his own throat, with his last gasp, in dying. Some fell at a blow; others stood upright though their arms were lopped; these were pierced by spears; those pinned to the ground; some fell on the enemy weapons, spouting blood from their veins; one stabbed his brother's breast, then to spoil the body of his kin, severed the head and flung it far off; while another slashed at his father's face, trying in wild fury to show those looking-on the man he slew was not his father. But no other death deserves a sole lament, we have no space to mourn individual men. This battle of Pharsalia was different than all other disasters: Rome suffered many deaths elsewhere, here Rome perished in the deaths of nations;

there soldiers died, here it was whole peoples;  
here the blood of Pontus, Assyria, and Achaea  
flowed, and all that gore a torrent from Roman  
veins washed from the field, while forbidding it  
to linger. The nations in this conflict were dealt  
a wound too heavy for their age alone to bear;  
here more than simply life and limb it was that  
perished: we were laid low for centuries, all  
generations doomed to slavery were conquered  
by those swords. What fault did we, their sons,  
their grandsons, commit that we deserved to be  
born under tyranny? Did we fight fearfully or  
shield our throats from the sword? The guilt  
for others' cowardice is pinned to our necks.  
If fate gave us, born later, a lord and master,  
it should have also granted us chance to fight!

### **Book VII:647-697 Pompey takes flight**

By now, wretched Pompey had realised the god's  
no longer favoured him, nor was the fate of Rome  
in his hands, compelled against his will by such  
disaster to despair of his fortunes. He stood far off  
on rising ground, from where he saw the carnage  
grip a Thessaly darkened by the clouds of battle.  
He saw the missiles aimed towards him, the piles  
of corpses, his own end presaged by all that blood.  
Yet he did not delight, as the wretched so often do,  
in drawing the whole world to destruction with him,  
and involving all mankind in his ruin. He still saw  
the gods as deserving of his prayer that the majority  
of Romans might survive him, a solace to him in  
his downfall. 'Refrain, you gods,' he cried, 'from  
the destruction of the nations. Let the world remain,  
let Rome survive, though Pompey should be ruined.  
If you would wound me more, I have a wife and sons;  
such hostages I have granted to fate. Is it not enough

that this civil war has destroyed me and mine. Is all the world's destruction insufficient? Why lacerate all things? Why work at universal destruction? Now, nothing of mine is left me, Fortune.' So saying, he then rode through the shattered ranks, all amongst the troops, rallying them to the standards, halting their flight to imminent death, saying he was not worthy of their sacrifice. He had no fear of facing those enemy swords, offering his chest or throat to the fatal blow; but dreading lest if he was killed his men might refuse to flee, and a whole world be heaped above his corpse; or wishing to conceal his death from Caesar's eyes. In vain, poor man; if his father-in-law needs gaze upon that head, it shall be everywhere forthcoming. But you, his wife, and your beloved face, are a further cause for flight, the fates decreeing that he shall not die with his better part absent. Thus Pompey rode swiftly from the field, oblivious to the spears around him, passing with high courage to his final doom, without groans or tears, only a noble sorrow filled with respect, as it was right for you to show towards Rome's ills, Pompey. With unchanged face you gazed on Pharsalia: victory in war never saw you arrogant, nor defeat downhearted, as superior in your fall to faithless Fortune as you were when delighting in your triumphs. Now Pompey goes along released from care, free of the burden of fate; now he can reflect on happier times; his unfulfilled hopes receding, now he can dwell on what he was. Flee from the fatal conflict, and summon the gods to witness, Pompey, none who fight on die for you. As in the later sad losses in Africa, as in the disaster at Munda, and the slaughter by the Nile, most of the fighting after Pharsalia and your flight, Pompey, indicated not the world's support for Pompey, nor a passion for war, but was what we see endlessly,

the battle between power and freedom. When you fled it was for their own cause the senators died.

### **Book VII:698-727 Pompey reaches Larissa**

Was it not joy to you, Pompey, to have desisted in defeat from war, and not to have witnessed the final horror? Look back at the ranks drowned in death, the rivers turbid with the flow of blood, and pity Caesar. With what feelings will he enter Rome, owing his power to such a battle as this? Whatever you had yet to suffer, exiled and alone, in foreign lands, whatever you had to endure from a tyrant Pharaoh, believe the word of the gods, and fortune that long favoured you, victory was worse. Forbid the noise of lamentation, curb the weeping, forgo the people's tears and grief. Let the world bow to Pompey in misfortune as they did in his success. No suppliant, gaze calmly on kings, gaze on the cities you seized, the thrones of Egypt and Libya you gave, and choose a place to die. Larissa first witnessed your fallen greatness, and that noble head unbowed by fate. She poured out all her citizens through her gates, met Pompey with all her people like a victor; with weeping, promised him gifts; opened their homes and temples to him, begging to share in his disaster. In fact, much of his vast authority remained and, all being inferior to him except his former self, he might have roused the nations again to arms, once again tempted fate. Yet: 'What use have the defeated for cities or nations,' he cried, 'offer your loyalty to the victor!' You, Caesar, were still trampling the life out of your country, wading through corpses piled high, while your son-in-law was granting you whole nations as a gift. When Pompey rode from Larissa, the groans and tears of the people followed, and many a reproach was levelled against the cruel gods. That day was proof, Pompey, of the affection you enjoyed,



and of its fruits: for the victor never knows if he is loved.

### **Book VII:728-780 The field of corpses**

When Caesar thought the battlefield drenched enough in Roman blood, he curbed the swords in soldiers' hands, granting their lives to those abject souls in the ranks whose death would serve no purpose. But fearing they might still rally to their opposing camp, and their fear be quelled by a night's rest, he chose to advance on the enemy ramparts, striking while the iron was hot and terror gripped the foe. He felt no fear that this order of his would tire his battle-hardened troops. The soldiers needed little exhortation to be led towards the spoils. 'The victory is complete, lads,' he cried, 'all that remains is the repayment for all our blood they shed, that is for me to point you to; with no talk of granting you what each may take for himself. Before you lies their camp and a wealth of precious metal; all the gold stolen from the West is there, tents crammed with the treasure of the East. The riches of many kings and of Pompey lies there to be claimed by its new lords: soldiers, make haste to outrun the fugitives; or all the wealth Pharsalia brings you the vanquished will seize.' What ditch or rampart could impede his men, seeking the spoils of war and wickedness? They rushed off to discover the wages of their sin, finding indeed many a weighty mass torn from a plundered world, against the costs of war; but not enough to satisfy their greedy minds. Though they had seized what Spain mines or Tagus yields, or rich Arimaspians gather from the surface of Scythian sands, they would have thought it poor reward for their crime. They'd promised all in hopes of plundering Rome, expecting the Tarpeian citadel would fall to the victor, these men who now pillaged a mere camp! Impious soldiers slept on turf piled high

for patricians, blood-stained commoners lay on beds  
fit for kings, and the guilty rested their bodies where  
fathers and brothers had lain. But nightmares troubled  
their sleep, frenzied images of the battlefield disturbed  
their tormented minds. The guilt for their savage crimes  
awake in every heart, their minds were still absorbed  
by war, their restless hands grasping at absent swords.  
I can well believe the land groaned, the guilty earth  
breathed forth spirits, the air was thick with ghosts,  
night in the upper world full of the terrors of hell.  
Their victory rightly demands a grim retribution,  
sleep bringing them flames and the serpents' hiss.  
The shades of dead countrymen stand beside them;  
each man has his own shape of terror to haunt him:  
one sees an old man's face, another that of youth,  
one is troubled all night by his brother's corpse,  
while a father's ghost weighs on another's breast,  
and every phantom invaded Caesar's dreams.  
So Pelopean Orestes gazed on the Furies' faces,  
before he had been cleansed at the Scythian altar.  
Neither Pentheus raving nor Agave newly sane  
were subject to greater horror or mental turmoil.

### **Book VII:781-824 Caesar denies the enemy dead burial**

That night, all those swords Pharsalia saw, all those  
the day of vengeance would see drawn by senators,  
were aimed at him; that night, the monsters of hell  
scourged him. Yet how much that guilty conscience  
of his could not yet punish, since Pompey still lived  
when Caesar viewed the ghosts of the Styx, and all  
of Hell, invading his sleep! All this he experienced,  
yet when the clear light of day revealed Pharsalia's  
slaughter no feature of the land could drag his eyes  
from that fatal field, and he gazed his fill on rivers  
running with blood, and mighty mounds of corpses.  
He beheld the heaps of bodies sliding to corruption,

counted nations of dead who had followed Pompey, while a place was prepared for his meal, from which he might study the faces and features of those corpses. He rejoiced that the soil of Emathia was hidden from view, the plain his eyes gazed on shrouded by corpses. In that bloody carnage he discerned the gods' favour and his destiny. And loath to lose, in his madness, the spectacle of that crime, he refused the wretched dead a pyre and forced Emathia on a guilty heaven. Cannae was lit by Libyan torches when Hannibal buried Aemilius Paullus, but that example did not serve to prompt Caesar to show humanity to his foe, for his anger was not yet sated by slaughter against these who he knew were his own countrymen. Yet they asked no individual pyres, no separate burning, the bodies might have been plunged in a single fire; or if he had wished to punish his son-in-law, Caesar might have heaped up Pindus' timber and piled high the oaks from Oeta's forests, for Pompey, aboard his ship, to view Pharsalia in flames. Still, such anger achieved nothing; it mattered not whether fire or putrefaction dissolved those corpses; nature receives all in her gentle arms, and the dead grant themselves their own end. If the flames do not take them now, they will consume them with the earth and the ocean waters later, when the communal pyre that's yet to come mingles dead men's bones with the stars. Wherever fortune summons yours, Caesar, their spirits also will be there: you may soar no further than they, nor seize a higher place in Stygian darkness. The dead are free from fate; earth takes back all she bears; he who has no urn has the sky to cover him. You, who punish these soldiers by denying them burial, why should you flee this carnage, or desert these stinking fields? Drink the water, Caesar; breathe the air if you can. For the men who decompose there have snatched

Pharsalia from you, routed the victor, hold the field.

### **Book VII:825-872 Philippi anticipated**

Not only Bistonian wolves were drawn to the dark feast Pharsalia offered, but lions too from Pholoe, scenting the rotting corpses. Bears left their dens and vile dogs came from the villages, every beast that scents foul air tainted by the smell of corruption. Birds that had long been tracking the armies of that civil war flocked there together. Cranes that migrate to the Nile in Thracian winter delayed their flight to the warm south. Never did the sky so shroud itself with vultures nor a greater host of wings beat the air. Every tree sent its birds, and their branches dripped with crimson dew from those blood-stained feathers. When the birds grew weary and dropped dead meat from their talons, rotting flesh and drops of blood fell on the victor's face and his accursed standards. That host of dead were not all picked to the bones nor wholly devoured by those predatory creatures; for though eating the limbs they ignored the vital organs, not desirous of prying at the bone-marrow. A greater part of the host they left to lie untouched; corpses days of sun and rain dissolved, blending them with the soil of Emathia. Wretched Thessaly, what crime of yours offended the gods so deeply that they forced on you such a mound of the dead, and so evil a destiny? How many centuries suffice for a neglectful posterity to take for granted the loss this war incurred? When will crops grow untainted in your blood-stained soil? To what Roman dead must your ploughshares do violence? Fresh armies will meet; and at Philippi, for a second time, before this blood is dry, you will offer your land to crime. Though we should empty the tombs of our ancestors, those that still stand and those split by ancient roots

whose urns are broken, those ploughs of Thessaly  
will turn up a greater heap of relics from the furrow,  
and the harrows that till the fields strike still more.  
No sailor should tie his rope to the Emathian shore,  
no plough turn the soil of that grave of the Roman  
people, for the farmer should flee the haunted fields;  
the thickets should shelter no flocks, nor the shepherd  
dare to graze his sheep on grass that grows above our  
bones. And Thessaly should lie as naked and unknown  
as lands made uninhabitable by zones of heat or cold,  
as if it were the only soil, not merely the first, to endure  
the evils of civil war. Oh, you gods above, would that  
you granted us the power to curse that guilty country!  
Why burden the whole earth so, and then absolve it?  
The slaughter at Munda, the mournful sea off Sicily,  
Mutina (Modena) and Actium have cleansed Pharsalia.

### **End of Book VII**

### **Book VIII:1-85 Pompey journeys to Lesbos**

Meanwhile, by winding tracks, Pompey made for the forested wastes of Thessaly beyond that vale of Hercules, wooded Tempe, urging on a horse wearied by flight and unresponsive to the spur, masking the confused traces of his retreat with a wandering labyrinth trail. He dreaded the roar of the wind in the swaying trees, while the sound of his comrades falling back to join him roused fear and agitation. Though fallen from the heights, he knew there was no trivial price on his head, and, remembering his past, believed his death would earn as great a reward as he would give for Caesar's severed head. Seeking solitude, he yet knew that his noble and powerful features would not allow him to hide from fate in a safe retreat. Many still seeking his camp at Pharsalia while rumour had not yet spread of his defeat were amazed to meet their general, astounded at his loss, and he was barely believed though telling himself of the disaster. The presence of any witness to his woe was galling to Pompey. He sought to be unrecognised by all, and pass through cities safely under an obscure identity, but Fortune who had long favoured him, now exacted a penalty from the wretched, bringing his weight of fame against him, and burdening him with his previous glories. Now he feels his honours came too swiftly, and curses those acts of his triumphant youth in Sulla's day; now in his fall he hates to remember his fleet's pursuit of Cilician pirates, his armies in Pontus. So long years destroy mighty hearts, and life may outlast power. Past greatness is a mockery unless our life and happiness end together, a swift death averting sorrow. Should any man dare to trust good fortune,

without the means of death at hand? Pompey had reached the shore where the Peneus, already dyed with blood from Pharsalia's slaughter, flowed to the sea. From there a boat vulnerable to the winds and waves, barely safe in the shallows, bore him, apprehensive, over the deep. He whose oars still beat the waters off Corcyra (*Corfu*), and the bays of Leucas (*Lefkada*), lord of the Cilicians and of the Liburnian lands, cowered like a frightened passenger in that skiff. He commanded the sail be bent towards secluded Lesbos, the isle entrusted with his beloved Cornelia, where she lay hidden but sadder than if she stood on Pharsalia's field. Her sorrow was intensified by apprehension, her sleep broken by anxiety and fear. Her every night was haunted by Thessaly; thus, as darkness ended, she ran to the heights of a steep cliff by the shore; gazing over the waves, she was always first to spy the sails of some approaching vessel, dipping in the distance, afraid to ask after her husband's fate. Behold now, a boat with sail making for your isle! What it bears you know not; till now sad news of war and ominous rumour fed your worst fears. Now your husband comes to you in defeat. Why lose a moment in mourning? Though you will weep, as yet you only fear! But now, as the vessel neared, she rose and marked the cruelty of guilty heaven, her husband's ghastly pallor, the grey hair that hid his face, his clothes black with dust. Faintness robbed her of the light of day, darkness closed upon her grief, sorrow stopped her breath, betrayed by the sinews her limbs folded, her heart froze, and for a long time she lay expecting death. A hawser was run to the shore, and Pompey trod the empty sand. Her loyal attendants, seeing him close at hand, dared not rail at fate except with stifled moans, while trying in vain to raise their

mistress from the ground, but Pompey clasped her in his arms, bringing life to her rigid limbs. The blood returned to the surface of her flesh, she became aware of his touch and was able now to recognise her husband's sorrowful face. He forbade her to succumb to destiny, while reproving her excess of grief: 'A woman noted for the titles, honours of such mighty ancestors, why let the first stroke of ill-fortune sap your strength? Here is your opportunity for centuries of lasting fame. Neither war nor office yields your sex glory, only a husband's misfortune. Rouse your courage, and let your affections strive with fate, embrace the fact of my defeat. Yours is the greater glory now, since power, and the dutiful ranks of senators, and all my royal followers quit me: be you now Pompey's sole companion. As long as your husband lives, such deep grief, admitting no relief, is unfitting; the height of fidelity must be to mourn the man himself. You suffered no loss from my defeat; Pompey survived the battle, though his glory perished. What you weep for, that you loved!'

### **Book VIII:86-108 Cornelia speaks**

Rebuked thus by her husband, Cornelia slowly raised her trembling limbs from the ground, and her moans gave vent to this complaint: 'O would that I were wedded to loathsome Caesar, being an ill-omened bride, bringing happiness to no man! Twice I harm mankind. The Fury and those Crassi, now shades, led me forth as a bride, and cursed by those dead I bring another Carrhae now to this Civil War, sending nations headlong, and driving heaven away from the better cause. O noble husband,



too good for such a wife, has fate such power  
over such a man? Why was I chosen to plague  
your marriage bed; only to bring you sorrow?  
Exact then the penalty, which I will gladly pay:  
give your companion to the waves, so the sea  
may be calmer for you, your kings keep faith,  
and the whole world more ready to serve you.  
I had rather I had laid down my life to bring  
your army victory; now Pompey expiate your  
defeat. Unforgiving Julia, you who have cursed  
our bed with civil strife, come from wherever  
you are buried, and exact the penalty, and then,  
appeased by your rival's death, spare Pompey.'  
With this she fell back into her husband's arms,  
and the eyes of all there were moved to tears.  
Pompey's stern heart was stirred, and Lesbos  
troubled those eyes that were dry at Pharsalia.

#### **Book VIII:109-158 Pompey sails from Lesbos**

Then the people of Mytilene, filling the shoreline,  
addressed Pompey: 'Since it will ever have been  
our greatest glory to have protected so mighty  
a general's wife, we pray you will honour our city  
bound to you by sacred ties, finding our homes  
worthy of sheltering you for this night at least.  
Make this a place that all will visit for centuries,  
where men shall come from Rome to worship.  
No place is more fitting for you to enter in defeat:  
all others may hope for the victor's favour, while  
this is already marked. Would Caesar not need  
his fleet since Lesbos is an island? Then most  
of the senators, aware of this, will gather here,  
you shall restore your fortune on these shores.  
Accept the wealth of our temples, the treasure  
of the gods; make use of our forces, whether  
on land or sea, whichever serves best. Employ

Lesbos in whatever manner she is worthy of.  
Accept, in defeat, what Caesar will only steal.  
Acquit our island, that has served you well,  
of this one crime: that in adversity our loyalty  
be doubted that you enjoyed in good fortune.’  
Overjoyed, in defeat, to find such devotion,  
glad, for mankind’s sake, for a faith unshaken,  
Pompey replied: ‘I have shown by my actions  
that no place on earth is dearer to me: while  
Cornelia was your hostage, Lesbos was Rome  
to me, my dear and sacred hearth and home;  
I sailed my ship for no other shore in flight,  
and though knowing Lesbos had earned cruel  
Caesar’s anger in keeping my wife from harm,  
I have not hesitated to commit myself to you,  
a powerful means for you to regain his favour.  
But here I must cease to implicate you further.  
It is for me to follow wherever fate leads me.  
Ah Lesbos, happiest of all, and famed forever,  
whether she shows the way to other nations  
and kingdoms to receive me, or alone is loyal.  
Now I mean to discover where good and evil  
dwell in this world. Hear a last prayer, you gods,  
if any are yet with me, grant me the likes of these  
people of Lesbos, who allow a defeated man,  
pursued by Caesar, to enter their harbour then  
leave again.’ So he spoke and led his saddened  
wife aboard. Such a lament rose along the shore  
you might have thought all were leaving their  
native soil for some foreign land, their hands  
thrust towards heaven. Pompey’s departure,  
whose ill-fortune alone had stirred their grief,  
moved them less than that of Cornelia, whom  
they had considered as one of their own during  
the conflict; at her leaving they groaned aloud.  
The women would scarcely have parted from  
her without tears even if she had been joining

a victorious spouse, such love had she inspired  
in them, some by her modesty, others by her  
truthfulness, and her pure and reticent looks,  
because humble of heart, and no burdensome  
guest to them all, she lived while her husband's  
fortunes stood as if her were already defeated.

### **Book VIII:159-201 Navigation by the stars**

The sun's fires by now were half-sunk in the waves,  
half-seen by those from whose hemisphere he sank,  
and by those, if such men exist, for whom he rose.  
The thoughts that troubled Pompey's mind turned  
from allies in league with Rome to the uncertain  
loyalties of kings, and the pathless lands that lay  
beyond the burning skies to the south. Such was  
the sad turmoil in his mind, such was his hatred  
of tomorrow that he threw off the heavy burden  
of uncertainty by asking the helmsman about  
the stars: how did he steer for land, what aid  
to cleave the waves lay in the sky, what stars  
served to make for Syria, which of the Wain's  
were a pointer to Libya? The expert watcher  
of the silent skies answered him thus: 'Those  
lights that glide and vanish from the starry sky,  
its axle never-resting, deceiving the wretched  
seaman, are not to be followed; but the un-setting  
pole-star that never sinks beneath the waves,  
brightest near the two Bears, guides our vessels.  
When I see him always lift on high, where  
Ursa Minor tops the mast-tree, then we face  
the Bosphorus and the Black Sea that indents  
the Scythian shore. But when the Bear-Keeper,  
Bootes, hangs clear from the mast-head, when  
the Little Bear sinks nearer the sea, the ship  
is headed for Syrian harbour. Then there is  
Canopus, a star that shuns the north and is

content to wander the southern sky: keep  
that to port and sail past Pharos, your ship  
will strike the Syrtes amidst the waves. But  
where would you bid me sail, what should  
our course be now?' Pompey, unsure, replied:  
'Let this be your only care, in sailing onwards,  
that the ship be further from Thessalian shores,  
leave behind the western seas and skies, trust  
the rest to the wind. I have my wife on board,  
the pledge I left when I knew what shore to seek,  
now chance must grant us harbour.' So he spoke,  
and the helmsman hauled hard on the level sail  
stretched from the yardarms, and turned to port,  
so as to cleave the rough waves roughened by  
Chios and the cliffs of Asina, slacking the ropes  
at the bow, while tightening those at the stern.  
The waves responded, altering in sound, as their  
prow sliced the sea and their course was changed  
more skilfully than the charioteer who pivots on  
his right wheel round the unscathed turning-post.

### **Book VIII:202-255 Deiotarus' mission**

The sun lit the earth and hid the stars. Whoever  
had fled far from the stormy field of Pharsalia  
now rallied to Pompey; the first to meet with him  
once he had quit Lesbos' shore was his son Sextus,  
next a loyal band of senators arrived; even now,  
cast down by fate and defeated in battle, Fortune  
did not rob him of kings to serve him: his friends  
in exile were lords of the earth, kings of the east.  
He sent Deiotarus, who had followed his leader  
on his wanderings, to scour the world, saying:  
'O most loyal of rulers, since Rome's sphere  
has been eclipsed by our disaster at Pharsalia,  
it remains to try the nations of the East, those  
who drink the waters of Tigris and Euphrates,

as yet secure from Caesar. Seeking to change our fate, do not hesitate to sound the reaches of distant Scythia, and far Parthia; change skies, carry this message to Parthia's proud Arsaces: 'If our former treaty holds, sworn in the name of the Thunderer by me, and made binding by your magi, fill your quivers, string those bows from Armenia with Getic sinew; O Parthia, did I not when I chased the doughty Alani, eternally at war, towards the Caspian Gates, did I not let you traverse the Persian plains, refuse to force your hasty refuge in Babylon? I passed Cyrus by, and the Chaldean realm, where swift Ganges and Nysaeon Hydaspes flow towards the sea, closer to the flames of the rising sun than Persia, and though everywhere victorious I refused to add the Parthians to my conquests and alone among the kingdoms of the East, treated you as equals. Twice, thanks to Pompey, the Arcasids were saved; for who curbed Rome's righteous anger when wounded by the slaughter at Carrhae? Let Parthia now, bound to me by so many favours, breach her borders, and pass the Euphrates, a thing forbid for centuries, at Alexander's Zeugma (*Birecik*). Conquer Rome, Parthia, for Pompey, and Rome will welcome you.' Though the task was difficult, Deiotarus did not refuse and, laying aside his royal insignia, he left in haste, wearing a slave's garb. In time of danger a ruler finds it safer to dress as a beggar; how much more secure then the truly poor than the lords of the earth! The king was set ashore, Pompey sailed past the cliffs of Icaria, and shunning the placid waters of Ephesus and Colophon, skirted

the foaming rocks of tiny Samos; a breeze  
blew from the shores of Cos; he avoided  
Cnidos, and Rhodes famed isle of the sun,  
and by-passed the long bay of Telmessus,  
keeping to open water. His ship now faced  
the land of Pamphylia, and though he had  
not yet dared to entrust himself to any city  
Pompey now entered your gate, little  
Phaselis (*Tekirova*), your scanty population  
scarcely a threat, your homes drained of men,  
such that there were more aboard ship than  
behind your walls. From here he once more  
set sail, until Mount Taurus rose to view,  
and Dipsus descending from Mount Taurus.

**Book VIII:256-330 Pompey at Syhedra (*Sedra*)**

Could Pompey have conceived how by suppressing piracy he himself would benefit? He fled unharmed along Cilicia's shores in his little vessel. A number of senators followed, gathering to the fugitive leader; and at Syhedra, that little harbour that sends outward and receives again Selinus' shipping, Pompey spoke sadly to the assembled statesmen: 'Comrades, in war and in defeat, who represent our country, though I, who seek your counsel, to endorse fresh strategy, stand here on the barren shores of Cilicia, with no army about me, yet hear me with hearts held high. I did not yield to total defeat on Pharsalia's field, nor are my fortunes so low I cannot lift my head once more, and shake off the disaster we suffered. If Marius could rise again to office from the ruins of Carthage, and grace those annals already filled with his name, shall Fortune's lighter blows deny me? A thousand ships of mine ride Greek waters, a thousand generals are mine. Pharsalia scattered my forces rather than destroying them. Even now

I might be secure through a whole world of deeds,  
and that name of mine that the whole world loves.  
Weigh well those realms of Libya, Parthia, Egypt  
as regards their strength and loyalty; say which  
might worthily retrieve Rome's fortunes, though  
I will reveal to you my private thoughts, and this  
decision to which my mind's inclined. I mistrust  
the extreme youth of Egypt's new Ptolemy, since  
loyalty in times of danger needs adult judgement.  
Then, I fear two-faced Juba's cunning, since that  
impious son of Carthage, mindful of his ancestry,  
threatens Italy; his empty head is full of Hannibal,  
whose remote link to his Numidian forefathers,  
taints his blood. When Varus once sought his aid,  
Juba swelled with pride seeing Rome a suppliant.  
So, up my friends, make haste for Eastern realms.  
Euphrates' waters hide a mighty world from us,  
and the Caspian gates enclose vast solitudes;  
a different hemisphere dictates Assyria's changes  
of night and day, and their sea is other than ours  
and its water tinged differently. Their one desire  
is warfare. Their horses are swift on the plains,  
their bows are strong, neither young nor old are  
slow to loose the deadly shaft, death accompanies  
every arrow. Their archers were the first to break  
the Macedonian phalanx, taking Bactra, capital  
of the Medes, and Babylon, that city of Assyria  
behind proud walls. Nor do they fear the Roman  
javelin, riding boldly to war, proving the power  
of their Scythian arrows the day that Crassus fell.  
The bolts they fire do not rely on steel alone, for  
their hurtling missiles are dipped deep in poison.  
A slight wound kills, death is in a mere scratch.  
Would that I had not such faith in the cruel sons  
of Arsaces! This destiny that rules the Medes  
too closely mirrors ours, and the gods greatly  
nurture them. I shall pour forth nations uprooted

from alien lands, send out all the east summoned  
from its cities. But if eastern faith and barbarian  
treaties fail me, let fortune bear me, in my ruin,  
beyond the beaten highways of the world: I shall  
not beg from kings I made. If I fall at the earth's  
end, this will be a mighty solace in dying: Caesar  
shall not outrage my corpse, nor pretend respect.  
When I review the tale of my life, I was always  
honoured in that Eastern world, famed indeed  
beyond the Sea of Azov, and by Sarmatia's Don!  
Where was my fame involved with more glorious  
deeds, from where did I return in greater triumph?  
Rome, favour my enterprise; what greater happiness  
can the gods grant you than waging civil war with  
Parthian troops, consuming their men, involving  
them with our ills? When Caesar's armies confront  
the Medes, fortune avenges the Crassi or myself.'  
So he spoke, but sensed from their mutterings that  
the gathering condemned his plans. Lentulus, who  
was most sensitive to honour's pangs and wounded  
nobility, spoke as befitted one who was once a consul:

### **Book VIII:331-455 Lentulus rejects Pompey's plans**

'Has defeat in Thessaly so broken your spirit? Must  
a single day determine the world's fate? Is this issue  
to be settled by the outcome of Pharsalia? Is there  
no cure for a bleeding wound? Is all that fortune  
leaves you, Pompey, to fall at the Parthians' feet?  
Why flee our world, scorning whole tracts of earth  
and sky, seeking hostile heavens and alien stars,  
to serve the Parthians, and worship at Chaldaean  
altars with barbaric rites? Why pretend to a love  
of freedom as your pretext for war? If you would  
be a slave, why deceive a suffering world? When  
you ruled Rome the Parthian king would tremble  
at your name, seeing you lead captive kings from



Hyrcanian forests and Indian shores; shall he now witness you cast down by fate, beaten and broken, raising his insane ambition against Rome's power, measuring himself and Rome by Pompey's pleas? Your outpourings to him will be unworthy of your courage and deeds; ignorant of our Latin tongue, he will demand you beg with tears. Must we suffer this stain upon our honour, that Parthia avenges Rome's disaster in Thessaly before Rome does so herself? Surely she elected you for civil war; why broadcast our sufferings and disasters among Scythian tribes ignorant of them? Why teach the Parthians to cross Euphrates? Rome loses much of the solace for her misery if she submits to a foreign king rather than obeying her own citizen. Is it your pleasure to march through the world and lead savages against the walls of Rome following standards taken on the Euphrates from the Crassi? One king was missing at Pharsalia, while Fortune's favours lay hidden, and will he then challenge Caesar's power after hearing of his victory, and make common cause with you? That nation of his lacks the confidence. Every man born to Northern cold is indomitable in war, courting death: but at every step towards the warmer East, the inhabitants grow softer as the sky becomes more clement. There it is all flowing garments and loose robes, even amongst the men. In the Persian lands, over Sarmatian plains, on the levels that extend beside the Tigris, the Parthian is free to flee, unconquerable by any; but where the land rises, he will not climb harsh mountain ridges, fight on in the gloom impaired by an uncertain mark for his bow, nor cleave the river's swift current by swimming. Nor, his limbs coated in blood from battle, will he suffer the stifling dust of a summer's day. Parthia lacks battering rams, the engines of war, and the strength to level ditches; anything that obstructs an arrow will foil the pursuing Persians. They skirmish, flee as they fight, and roam

in vague squadrons. They are quicker to yield ground than dislodge the enemy. They smear poison on their shafts, lacking the courage to engage at close quarters, and draw their bows at a venture, then allow the wind to carry their arrows where it will. All strength belongs to the sword, and every manly race fights with the blade. But the Parthian is disarmed in the moment of attack, and forced to retreat with empty quiver. They ever rely on poison, and never strength of arms. Do you, Pompey, call on those who are scared to face war's uncertainty with the steel alone? Is the temptation of this shameful alliance so great, that sees you parted from your country by half a world, so you may lie beneath barbarous earth, hidden in a poor and vile grave, yet shameful still while Crassus seeks burial in vain? Yours is the easier destiny, since the ultimate penalty holds scant fear for the brave, but Cornelia has more to fear from the power of that infamous king. Is that barbarous lust forgotten, which flouts the marriage vows and the sanctities of wedlock with polygamous union, in the manner of blind beasts; where the secrets of the bridal chamber are infamously revealed to his harem of a thousand women? The king madly aroused by food and wine, dares couple in ways the law finds too monstrous to define; the whole night through will not serve to weary the man of such charms. Their sisters lie in the beds of kings and, though sacred, their mothers. In unhappy legend Thebes, Oedipus' city, was condemned by mankind for the crime he unwittingly committed. And how often has an Arsaces not been born of such a union to rule the Parthians! What is thought evil by one who thinks it right to couple with his own mother? Metellus' noble daughter will serve the barbarian's bed, one more among a thousand wives; yet the king's lust, Pompey, will seize on her more than another, fired by cruelty and her husbands' fame, since it will heighten that Parthian's monstrous pleasure knowing that she was once the wife of Crassus, as if to be carried off

a slave were the fate due her for his defeat at Carrhae. If that wretched wound we suffered in the East still rankles, you will not merely blush to seek aid from that death-dealing king, but for having waged war on Romans first. What greater reproach can people bring against you and your father-in-law than that while you met in conflict vengeance for the Crassi was forgotten? All our generals should have gone to Bactra and, so that not one single weapon were lacking, the northern frontiers of the Empire laid bare to the Dacians, the tribes beyond the Rhine, while Babylon and perfidious Susa were laid in ruins above their monarchs' tombs. Fortune, we pray that the Assyrian truce may end, and if this civil war was settled at Pharsalia, let whoever conquered head for Parthia. There is the nation I would love to witness Caesar triumphing over. Will not the shade of Crassus, of that sorrowful old man, pierced by Scythian arrows, hurl this reproach at you, once you have crossed the cold Araxes: "Do you come here to make peace, you whom we unburied ghosts hoped would avenge our ashes after death?" There signs of our defeat will meet your eyes; those walls around which they dragged the headless bodies of our generals, where Euphrates' waters closed over so many famous men, and Tigris' current bore our dead deep underground and then once more to light. If you can face that, Pompey, you might rather petition Caesar ensconced on Pharsalia's field. Why not turn your eyes to the Roman world? If you fear Juba's lack of faith, whose realm stretches far southward, then let Ptolemy's Egypt be our goal. His kingdom is protected to the west by Libyan Syrtes, and to the north the Nile, with its seven mouths, meets the sea. A land replete with its own resources, it has no

need of trade or rainfall, so great is its reliance on the Nile alone. The sceptre the boy Ptolemy holds he owes to you, Pompey; it was entrusted to your guardianship. Who can dread the mere shadow of a name? He is harmless at that age. Look not for justice, loyalty, or fear of the gods in a long-established court. The habits of power know no shame; a kingdom's burden is lightest when the king is new.' Lentulus now fell silent, but his speech had already swayed their minds. What freedom is granted by a mere anticipation of death! So Pompey's proposals were defeated.

### **Book VIII:456-535 Pompey reaches Egypt**

Now Pompey quit Cilicia's shores and sailed his ships in haste for Cyprus, which the goddess Venus prefers to her other shrines, remembering the Paphian waves if we are to believe the tale of her birth, and if indeed it is right to propound the view that the gods had a beginning. Skirting its coast, passing the long line of cliffs projecting southwards, they set a course across the open sea. Unable to make Pharos, whose lighthouse at night is a blessing, struggling with the sails, they reached Egypt's delta further east where of seven branches of the dividing Nile the largest ends in the shoals of Pelusium. It was on that day when Libra weighs equal hours of night and daylight with level scales, the shortening days thereafter recompensing wintry night for the hours of darkness lost in spring. Now, learning that Pharaoh was camped on Mount Casius, Pompey sailed there, the sun and the sails yet aloft. By then, a lookout, taking horse swiftly on the shore, had filled the nervous court with news of the arrival. There was barely time to consult; yet the counsellors of the Pharaoh's palace gathered, Acoreus among

them, made milder by his years, and sobered by weakness, whom Memphis, with its vain rites, bore, Memphis that measures the depth of the rising Nile; and during his priesthood more than one Apis bull had lived its quarter century assigned by the Moon. He was first to speak at council, talking of loyalty, mutual benefit, of the dead Pharaoh's sacred treaty. But Pothinus, one fitter to know and sway evil kings, dared to argue for Pompey's death, saying: 'Ptolemy, human rules and divine ones may send many wrong; we must punish the loyalty we praise when it supports those whom Fortune crushes. Follow fate and the gods: court the fortunate, shun the defeated. Wrong-headed rectitude and utility are far apart as earth from the stars, fire from water. The sceptre's power perishes utterly once we begin to weigh thoughts of justice; too much respect for virtue levels strongholds. Endless crimes, and free use of the sword, make hated monarchs safe. Commit every cruelty, and suffer for it unless you do. Let the man who would be pious quit the court. Virtue and absolute power never dwell together; for he who is ashamed of cruelty, must live in fear. Let not Pompey despise your youth with impunity, who believes you incapable of driving a beaten man from your shores. If you regret the kingship, there are others nearer you in blood – restore Pharos and the Nile to your sister, Cleopatra, whom you banished, rather than let some foreigner rob us of the throne. Let us defend Egypt from Roman arms, at least. Whatever did not belong to Pompey during the war, is not the victor's either. Driven from place to place, no faith left in fortune, he seeks a nation to share his fall. Dragged down by the shades of the dead, it is not so much Caesar's sword he flies from, as the senate's gaze, so many senators glutted the vultures of Thessaly; he fears the tribes he deserted, left weltering in their blood; dreads the kings whose might he destroyed; guilty

of Pharsalia, rejected by every land, now he troubles our country, which he has not yet ruined. And our complaint against him, Ptolemy, is more just than any he has of us. Why does he sully our secluded peace-loving Pharos with the sinful stain of war, and give Caesar grounds for mistrusting us? Why, in his fall, choose this country above all on which to bring Pharsalia's doom, a punishment not ours? Already we incur a guilt purged only by the sword. At his persuasion the Senate granted us sovereignty over Egypt, and so we prayed for his victory. Yet the sword that destiny commands me to brandish I drew for the defeated, not intentionally for him. Pompey, I shall pierce your heart, though I had rather it had been Caesar's: we are caught by this flood that sweeps away all things. Do you not see the need to do you violence while we can? What misguided faith in our kingdom brings you here, unhappy man? Do you not know our ineffectual subjects, almost too weak to till the soil moistened by the retreating Nile? If we must take the measure of our kingdom, then we must confess our frailty. Ptolemy, can you sustain Pompey's ruin, beneath which Rome is buried? Do you dare rake the ashes of Pharsalia's pyre, and bring war on your realm? Why, before Pharsalia's battle we refused to arm; shall we join Pompey now when all desert him? Do you challenge the victor's power and proven destiny? It is right in following success not to fail it in defeat, but we need not befriend the wretched.'

### **Book VIII:536-636 The murder of Pompey**

All seconded the crime. The boy-king was pleased by a deference seldom shown him, in that his attendants allowed him to command such a thing. Achilles was chosen to commit that evil act, where the treacherous

land juts out among the sands of Mount Casius, where the Egyptian shoals testify to neighbouring Syrtes, and he manned a small boat with armed accomplices for the wicked deed. O you gods, had the land of Nile, barbarous Memphis, and those effeminate peoples of Egyptian Canopus the courage for this? Had that civil war so oppressed the world? Had Rome fallen so far? What place had Egypt, and a Pharaoh's sword in our tragedy? Civil war should at least preserve this nicety: death at Roman hands far from foreign vileness. If Pompey's bright name pricked a Caesar's conscience, should you, Ptolemy, not have feared its ruinous fall? How did you dare, vile manikin, to involve your foul sacrilegious self, while the heavens thundered? Had he, Pompey, never conquered worlds, or driven thrice to the Capitol in triumph, ruled kings, championed the Senate, or been son-in-law to Caesar, yet still he was a Roman, and that should have been enough for a king of Egypt. Why probe our heart with your blade, perverse child, who did not know where your destiny lay? Already your claim to Egypt's throne was a lie, since civil war had overthrown him who granted it. Pompey, denying the wind his sails, was being rowed towards the accursed shore, when that little twin-oared boat drew alongside carrying its murderous crew. Feigning to welcome him to Egypt, they bid him step from the stern of his tall vessel into their little craft, pleading the shallow depth and the surf of two seas breaking on the sandbars, that prevented foreign ships from anchoring near. What but the power of destiny, that tragic fate decreed by the eternal order, drew him, doomed to die, to that shore, such that all his comrades felt presentiments of murder, for if the king had been genuinely loyal, a Pharaoh would have met him with all his fleet, and thrown open the court to Pompey from whom its royalty derived? Yet

Pompey yielded to fate, obeying when requested to leave his ship, choosing to die rather than show fear. Cornelia in turn hastened to embark aboard the hostile craft, fearing disaster and even less willing therefore to be left behind by her husband, but he cried: 'Wait, my rash wife and you, my son, I beg you; watch what occurs on shore and let my survival prove this Pharaoh's good faith.' But, deaf to his admonition, Cornelia stretched out her hands, saying wildly: 'Why are you leaving me, so cruelly? Are you to desert me once more, as you so kept me from the horrors of Pharsalia? Wretches parted with never a happy omen! If you choose to keep me from every shore, then you might as well, in fleeing, have sailed past Lesbos, and left me there to my seclusion. Is my company only pleasing to you on the waves?' Pouring out her remonstrance in vain, she hung by the ship's side, fear and panic preventing her from gazing at Pompey or averting her eyes. The fleet lay at anchor, the crews fearful of their leader's fate, not that he might be attacked, but that he might bow low, humbly petitioning one whose sceptre he had granted. As he prepared to step across, a Roman soldier called to him from the Egyptian boat, Septimius who, shame on all the gods, had abandoned the javelin for the base banner of a royal minion. Savage, violent, and brutal, he was no more than a wild beast in his love of killing. One might have thought Fortune was showing mercy when she kept that blood-stained sword far distant from Pharsalia, when he played no part in that battle, but no, she scatters her weapons widely, so that no place on earth is free of civil murder. In an act that brought shame on Caesar himself, and will forever be a reproach to heaven, it was a Roman obeyed the boy Pharaoh's order, and Pompey's head was severed by a man who had once served under him. With what infamy Septimius' name will descend



to posterity! If Brutus' deed was called wicked, what name should be granted to this crime? Now Pompey's day was done, borne off in the Egyptian boat, he was already lost. Then the king's creatures drew their steel, and he, on seeing the approaching blades, covered his head and face, disdaining to expose them bare to Fortune's stroke. Then closing his eyes he stifled his breath, so he could not speak or mar his eternal glory by weeping. When Achilles drove the fatal point through his side, he gave no cry, nor acknowledged the wicked act, remaining motionless, proving his strength in dying, these thoughts whirling in his mind: 'Future ages that never shall forget Rome's turmoil, are watching now; in every quarter of the world, those to come will envision this boat, and a Pharaoh's treachery: think now of fame, you, to whom success flowed throughout your long life, for men will not know if you could endure adversity, unless you show it by your death. Do not yield to shame nor grieve at the author of your death: think it the hand of your kinsman whoever slays you. Let them mutilate and scatter my limbs, yet, you gods, I am content, and no god can rob me of this. Life may alter our good fortune; death can make no man wretched. Cornelia and my son witness my murder, so then with patience let resentment stifle its complaint; If they admire the manner of my death, they will love me all the more.' Such power had Pompey over his mind and spirit as he encountered death.

### **Book VIII:637-662 Cornelia laments**

But Cornelia, readier to suffer savagery than witness it, filled the air with her mournful cry: 'O, my husband, I am guilty of your death: Lesbos' remoteness was cause of your fatal delay, Caesar has reached Egypt's shores

before you; for who else could command such a crime? But whoever the gods sent to destroy him, whether you serve Caesar's hatred or your own, you do not see, cruel man, where Pompey's heart truly lies, showering your blows in haste where, in defeat, he welcomes them. Let him suffer a punishment as heavy as death, let him see my head fall first. I am hardly free of guilt in this war, a wife who accompanied him in camp and aboard ship, undeterred by disaster, welcoming him in defeat though kings feared so to do. Is this then my reward, husband, to remain aboard ship, in safety? Faithless one, would you spare me? Am I so worthy of life, while you go seeking death? I too shall die, yet not owe it Ptolemy. You sailors, let me leap headlong, twist a noose of rope about my neck, or let some friend of Pompey's prove worthy of him by driving a sword through my flesh; he may do it for Pompey and yet claim it for Caesar. O you cruel men, do you thwart my readiness to die? Though you yet breathe, husband, Cornelia is at liberty no longer: they forbid me to summon death, kept alive for Caesar.' So she cried out, and fainting, was carried off in her servants' arms, as their ship tremulously fled.

### **Book VIII:663-711 The severed head**

Now those who saw Pompey's severed head after the blade had passed from front to back admitted that the noble beauty of these sacred features, that the visage that frowned at heaven had not altered, and that the onset of death had brought no change to the look and countenance of the hero. Savage Septimius, in the doing of his crime, had enacted one still worse, slitting the fabric and uncovering the sacred features of the dying Pompey, grasping the still-breathing head, positioning the neck over a thwart, severing the veins and sinews, hacking at length through the vertebrae. It was not yet

the practice to send the head spinning at a blow. Then when that head was severed from its body, Achilles, the Egyptian lackey, appropriated it, fondling it in his hands. Thus a Roman soldier sank so low as to act the inferior role, slicing the sacred head of Pompey from his body, with his accursed sword, yet not retaining it himself! O what a depth of shame was his! So the impious boy-king might know Pompey was dead, hands grasped the manly locks kings revered, the hair that graced his noble brow, and while the face still looked as it had in life, the lips as if still murmuring with dying breath, the eyes glaring; thrust the head on a pike; that head whose call to arms banished peace, that shook the Senate, the Campus and the Rostrum; that face, Rome's Destiny, that you were proud to wear. Not sated with the sight of it the vile king wished proof of his crime to remain, and so by hideous arts the blood was drained from the flesh, the brain removed, the skin dried, the moisture causing corruption was drawn from the innermost parts and, by infusions of drugs, the head embalmed. Degenerate king, last scion of Macedonian Lagus, doomed to yield the crown to an incestuous sister, while you preserve Alexander's corpse in a sacred vault, while the ashes of kings rest beneath piles of masonry, the dead Ptolemies, their worthless dynasty, enclosed in pyramids and mausoleums, shamelessly; the waves strike Pompey, whose headless trunk is tossed about in the shallows. Was it so hard to keep the body whole for his kinsmen to see? Thus cruel Fate faithfully granted him success till the very end, then she sought him at the summit of his glory, by his death exacting the price, in a single day, for all the disasters from which she had defended him all those years. He,

Pompey, was the only man who never knew good mixed with ill, whose happiness no god disturbed, and whose ultimate wretchedness no deity spared. Fortune having restrained herself struck him that one blow. Tossed on the sand, bruised by the rocks, his wounds washed by the sea, he was the plaything of Ocean and, no feature remaining, the sole sign this was Pompey was the lack of his severed head.

### **Book VIII:712-822 Pompey's grave**

Before Caesar could reach the sands of Egypt, Fortune had granted Pompey a hasty burial, lest he lack a tomb or receive a better. Swiftly, in fear, Cordus left the place where he had hidden and descended to the shore; Cordus, who as quaestor was Pompey's unfortunate companion on the voyage from the Icarian shore of Cyprus where Cinyras reigned. He dared to make his way under cover of darkness, and driven by duty, mastered his fear so as to seek the corpse in the waves, find and drag it ashore. A sorrowful moon shed little light through the dense clouds, but the headless body's darker colour made it visible in the foam. Cordus held tightly to his master, against the pull of the sea, then unequal to its power waited for a wave to add its force to his efforts. Once it was out of reach of the ocean, he clasped the corpse, pouring tears over every wound, and cried to the faint stars in heaven: 'Fortune, no costly pyre heaped with incense does Pompey, your favourite, ask of you; no Eastern perfumes carried with its fumes to the stars; no funeral procession displaying his former trophies with pious Romans bearing on their shoulders a father of their country; no sorrowful music to fill the Forum; no army in mourning, with trailing weapons, to march round the flames. Grant Pompey instead the wretched bier of a pauper's funeral, and let his wounded body rest on a plain pyre, yet with no lack of wood for lowly

hand to kindle. Be sated then, you gods, that Cornelia is not here to lie prostrate, with dishevelled hair, nor will she clasp her husband or see the torches applied; she, his unhappy wife, though not yet far distant from the shore, cannot pay her last tribute here to the dead.' When Cordus had spoken, he noticed at some distance a feeble pyre, one now incinerating a corpse, untended and unguarded. From this he hastily snatched a brand, dragging the charred branch from beneath the body: 'Pardon the alien hand,' he cried, 'whoever you were, neglected and uncared for by your kin, yet still more fortunate after death than Pompey; pardon the hand that steals from your blazing pyre. If feelings remain after death, you will yield me a flame, allow this theft from your fire, ashamed to find your own cremation before Pompey's headless trunk.' So saying, he took the burning ember and returned to the body which had almost been lifted by the sea from the shoreline. He scraped at the sand then hastily laid fragments of a broken boat found nearby in the narrow trench. The body was not laid on a pile of wood, no pyre exalts the noble dead, the fire was not beneath him but all around him and, seated near to the flames, Cordus cried: 'O mighty general, and unique glory of the Romans, if this fire is sadder for you than no burial at all, than to be tossed by the sea, avert your powerful spirit's gaze from the rite I render; the injuries of fate proclaim this lawful; accept this lowly brand, all that is possible, so that no sea-creature, beast or bird, or cruel Caesar's wrath dare come near: a Roman hand kindles the flames. These sacred ashes shall not rest here if fate grants us a return to Italy, but Cornelia will receive you, Magnus, transferring them from my hand to an urn. In the meantime, let me mark this place in the sand, as a sign of your grave, so that whoever wishes to placate the dead and pay full funeral honours may

recover your ashes and knows to what strand your head belongs.' With this, he added fresh fuel to the flames. Slowly Pompey's body was consumed, and in melting fed the fire with the dissolving flesh. By now the false dawn that precedes full daylight had struck the stars; fearfully he broke off the rites and sought his hiding place on the shore. Poor man, what punishment should you dread for a crime for which the voice of fame will welcome you for all time to come? That impious father-in-law of his will welcome the burial of Pompey's bones: go, certain of pardon, confessing you interred him, demand the head. Duty demanded he complete the task. Snatching up the charred bones not yet fully parted from the sinews and quenching them, oozing scorched marrow, in the sea, he piled them together under the cover of a few handfuls of earth. Then, lest the breeze should scatter the bare ashes, he laid a stone in the sand, and so no sailor might moor his boat there and disturb the grave, he wrote the sacred name with a charred stick: 'Pompey lies here.' Is fate happy to call this Pompey's grave, one that Caesar thought worse than no burial at all? Rash hand, why thrust a tomb on Pompey, imprison his wandering spirit? It roams wherever the furthest land floats on Ocean's encircling stream: the bounds of his sepulchre are those of Rome's name and power. Away with that stone, and its reproach against heaven! All Oeta is Hercules', and Nysa's hills know none but Bacchus; why then but a single stone in Egypt for Pompey? If no grave were attributed to his name, he might lie anywhere in Pharaoh's kingdom; mankind in doubt would shun the sands of Nile, fearing to tread on Pompey's ashes. But if you think one stone suffices to record his sacred name, then add his great victories, the records of his mighty deeds; add fierce Lepidus' rising, and the Alpine war; the victory over Sertorius

when the consul was recalled, and his triumph while yet a knight; the seas made wholly safe for commerce, and the Cilicians driven from the seas; add how he subdued barbarous tribes, nomadic peoples, and all the rulers to east and north. Say how he re-adopted the citizen's robes after every war, and that content with three triumphs he deferred further celebration. What tomb has space to record it all? Here instead stands a little stele, with no titles, no rolls of office, and Pompey's name that men might read high on the temples of the gods, and over arches decorated with enemy spoils, is barely raised above the sands, so low strangers must stoop to read, and travellers from Rome would pass by were it not made known.

### **Book VIII:823-870 A curse on Egypt**

O land of Egypt, rendered guilty through civil war, how right the Cumaean Sibyl was to warn in her verses that no Roman military man should visit the mouths of the Nile nor its margins that flood in summer. What curse can I invoke against those cruel shores in punishment for so dreadful a crime? May Nile's waters flow backwards and be penned there in that region where it rises; may the barren fields be devoid of those winter rains, and may all their soil revert to the dry sands Ethiopia knows. You, Egypt, keep our dead a prisoner in your dust, though we admit your Isis, your half-divine jackal Anubis, and the *sistrum* summoning worshippers to mourn the Osiris you prove mortal by your grief. And Rome, though she has now dedicated a temple to the tyrant Caesar has not yet reclaimed Pompey's ashes, and his shade remains in exile. If a former generation feared Caesar's menace, surely now Rome might welcome the bones of her beloved Pompey; if they still exist, that is, in that hateful

land, and have not been washed away by the sea.  
Do men fear to disturb his grave, and remove  
those sacred remains so worthy of reverence?  
If only Rome would command me to perform  
that act, and chose to make use of my services!  
I would be content, oh more than that, blessed,  
if it fell to me to despoil the grave so unworthy  
of those remains, exhume them, and carry them  
to Italy. Perhaps when Rome requires of heaven  
an end to barren fields, deathly winds, excessive  
heat, or earthquakes, the gods' advice will bid  
you return, Pompey, to your city, and the Pontiff  
bear your ashes. Even now, those who travel  
to Syene, parched under fiery Cancer, to Thebes  
dry even beneath the rainy Pleiades, to regard  
the Nile; all those who seek the Red Sea's calm  
waters, and the harbours of far Arabia to trade  
in Eastern wares; will be summoned by that  
gravestone and those ashes, disturbed by now,  
maybe, and scattered on the sand; to worship  
and appease Pompey's spirit, giving preference  
to him above Casian Jupiter. That grave cannot  
impair his fame, his ashes were no more precious  
if buried in a gilded shrine. Fortune, pent in this  
grave, is a supreme deity at last; this wave-beaten  
stone on Africa's shore prouder than all Caesar's  
altars. Many who deny the Capitol's gods their  
gift of incense, worship the lightning-struck turf  
fenced by the augur. One day it may prove better  
that no great heap of solid marble were raised here  
as a lasting monument. In a while the little mound  
of dust will be scattered, the grave collapse, and all  
trace of the dead Pompey will be lost. A happier age  
will arise when no credence may be given the stone  
that is displayed, and our descendants think Egypt  
as false regarding Pompey's tomb as Crete Jupiter's.



## **End of Book VIII**

## **Book IX:1-50 Cato imbued with Pompey's spirit**

Now Pompey's spirit found no rest among those Egyptian embers, no heap of ash could constrain his mighty shade. Soaring from the flames, leaving the charred flesh, and that unworthy pyre behind, it sought the Thunderer in heaven. Where our dark atmosphere, that fills the region between Earth and the orbit of the moon, meets the starry spheres, there dwell the shades of demi-gods, whose fiery virtues fit them, their lives being guiltless, to inhabit the lower regions of the aether, their souls gathered to the eternal realms, barred to those shrouded with incense, entombed in gold. Once steeped in the clear light of those regions, Pompey's shade gazed at the wandering planets, the fixed stars of the heavens, saw beneath what darkness our light lies, smiling at the headless travesty of a body that was his. Thus his spirit flew over Pharsalia's field, over cruel Caesar's standards, over the ships weaving about the sea, to find a dwelling place in the mind of indomitable Cato, then settle, an avenger of crime, in Brutus' sacred breast. Cato had hated Pompey as he did Caesar while the war's outcome was uncertain, and none could say whom civil strife would make master of the world. Yet, driven on by his country's need, following the senators, he joined Pompey's camp; and now after Pharsalia's disaster, he wholeheartedly favoured Pompey. His country lacking a defender, he took the role, revived the weakened body of his nation, restoring the swords that cowardly hands let fall, and waged civil war without ever seeking power or fearing to serve. He did nothing warlike for his own ends, and after Pompey's death his whole party became the party of freedom. Yet its adherents were scattered round the coast and lest a victorious Caesar roll them up in his rapid progress Cato sought refuge in Corfu, carrying the remnants of Pharsalian disaster in a host of vessels. Who would have thought those thousand ships were now carrying an army in flight; who would

have thought the sea contained a fleet of the defeated?  
Next Cato sailed for Dorian Malea, for Taenarus open  
to the dead, then Cythera, shunning the coast of Greece,  
as the north wind drove on his fleet, skirting the shores  
of Crete as the waves yielded to them. When Libyan  
Phycus dared to close its harbour to the ships, Cato  
attacked and overthrew that town deserving of being  
mercilessly ravaged. From there gentle breezes wafted  
him to your shores, Paliurus, for Africa bears witness  
that your quiet harbour pleased the Trojan steersman  
Palinurus, remembered thus in other than Italian waters.  
There the sight of sails far out to sea filled their minds  
with doubt; did they carry companions in misfortune,  
or their enemies? Fearful of Caesar's rapid progress,  
they conceived of his presence in every vessel seen.  
Yet the ships were freighted with grief and mourning,  
with misfortune to draw a tear even from stern Cato.

#### **Book IX:51-116 Cornelia's departure from Egypt**

For Cornelia's prayers having so restrained the flight  
of her stepson and the crew, that it was clear Pompey's  
corpse would not be driven by the sea from the Egyptian  
shore, and the rising smoke having indicated the flames  
of his imperfect burial rite, she cried out then: 'Fortune,  
I was unworthy, it seems, to gather my Magnus' body  
from the waves, bend over his cold limbs, throw myself  
on his corpse, let flow a flood of tears over every wound,  
light my husband's pyre, burn my plucked tresses, gather  
to my heart scorched bone and ashes, so as to sprinkle  
whatever was saved from the extinguished flames there  
in the temples of the gods! The pyre burns on without  
the funeral honours, and perhaps, unwelcomed by his  
shade, some Egyptian hand performs this service. Well,  
that the Crassi remained unburied! With these flames,  
the gods show less respect to Pompey. Was there ever  
a sadder fate than mine? Shall it never be granted me

to give a husband due burial? Never to mourn over  
an urn filled with ashes? Yet why is a grave needful,  
what trappings does grief require? Do I not, unworthy  
woman, hold Pompey wholly in my heart? Does his  
image not inhabit my inmost thoughts? Let a wife  
who wishes to survive a husband seek out his ashes.  
For now, this fire whose meagre light blazes far off,  
rising from the Egyptian shore, reveals you, to me,  
Magnus, still. And now the flames die, the smoke  
that bears Pompey from me fades as the sun rises,  
and a breeze I loathe is filling my vessel's sails.  
With sorrow, believe me, I leave Egypt's shores.  
They are more welcome to me than the conquered  
lands that yielded Pompey triumphs, his chariot  
rolling over the stones to the lofty Capitol. That  
fortunate Pompey lapses from my mind; the one  
I need is he whom Nile possesses, and I moan  
I may not cling to the land that saw this crime,  
a land whose guilt commends its sands to me.  
Sextus, I bid you seek the throes of war, carry  
your father's standard throughout the world.  
For Pompey left this command for his sons,  
left this message in my care: "When the fatal  
hour brings my death, take up the civil war,  
my sons, and while any offspring of my line  
remains on earth, never let the Caesars reign  
in peace. Rouse those kings and states strong  
in their own freedom; invoke our glorious name;  
this role, those armies I leave to you. Should  
a Pompey take to the seas he will find fleets,  
my heirs shall stir many a nation to battle;  
only let your hearts remain indomitable,  
remember your father's power. Cato alone,  
if he should rally a party to defend liberty,  
you may fittingly obey." Now I fulfil my  
trust, and have done your bidding Pompey.  
So you lured me successfully into living on,

that, deceived, I might not perfidiously  
carry your message to the grave. Now I  
can follow you, husband into the depths  
of chaos, Tartarus, if such a place there be,  
uncertain how distant lies my fated death;  
punished by then for surviving over-long.  
My heart had the strength to see you die,  
Magnus, and not yet take refuge in death:  
it will end bruised by blows, melt away  
among tears, for I shall never touch rope  
or blade, or launch myself through the air,  
and shame on me if I do not die of grief  
alone, now you are dead.' Speaking thus,  
she covered her head in a mourning veil,  
and choosing to endure darkness she hid  
herself in the ship's hold, clasping her  
grievous sorrow to herself, enamoured  
of tears and loving grief in her husband's  
stead. Neither the height of the waves nor  
the howl of the east wind in the rigging  
troubled her, nor the shouts rising louder  
as the danger grew. Begging to suffer what  
the frightened sailors now begged to escape,  
she lay as one dead, in league with the storm.

#### **Book IX:117-166 Pompey's sons**

First Cyprus received their ship in its foaming  
waves, then an easterly, ruling the sea but with  
less fury, drove them to Libya and Cato's camp.  
Gnaeus, Pompey's elder son, gazed in sorrow  
from the shore at his brother, Sextus, and his  
father's friends, then rushed wildly into the sea,  
shouting: 'Brother, where is our father; is that  
summit and crown of all the world still living,  
or are we destroyed, has Magnus taken Rome  
with him to the shadows?' So Gnaeus spoke,

and his brother answered: 'O, happy are you whom fate drove to foreign shores, who only heard evil: my eyes, brother, were condemned to witness our father's death. He did not fall to Caesar's weapons, no worthy hand proved author of his ruin: he died in the power of that vile ruler of the Nile, still relying on the gods of hospitality, and that great favour he gifted the dynasty: he fell victim to having granted them the crown. I saw the murderers lacerate our noble father's breast. Not crediting the king of Egypt with such boldness, I thought Caesar must have reached the Nile. But more than his bloody wounds, I grieved their carrying his head through the city, fixed high on a pike. They said the king sought proof of his crime, that it was kept for the cruel conqueror to see. As to the body, I do not know if it was torn to pieces by the wild dogs of Egypt or by vultures, or burnt in the stealthy fire I saw. Whatever injury of fate robbed us of his body, I free the heavens above of guilt, but moan for the part which remained.' Gnaeus did not display his grief in tears or groans on hearing the tale but, burning with indignation and love of his father, cried: 'To the ships, my mariners; quit this shore; drive the oars and let the fleet head boldly into the wind. With me, my captains, to inter the unburied dead; no greater prize was ever offered to those in civil conflict as this: appease the shade of Pompey with the blood of this unmanly king! Shall I not drag Alexander's body from its shrine, and sink it, with his city, beneath the sluggish waves of Mareotis? Shall I not haul Amasis and all those other

Pharaohs from their tombs in the Pyramids,  
and send them swimming down the Nile?  
Let the loss of their sepulchres atone for  
Magnus who has none! I shall disclose that  
funereal shrine of Isis, goddess of the nations,  
and scatter Osiris, shrouded in linen, through  
the streets. Their gods shall make a pyre for  
my father's head. Their land I shall give over  
to punishment, leaving their fields with none  
to tend them, Nile abandoned, men and gods  
fleeing Egypt, which you alone, my father,  
shall possess!' So he swore, and sought in  
anger to launch the fleet at once, but Cato,  
while praising the youth, restrained his fury.

#### **Book IX:167-214 Cato eulogises Pompey**

As the news of Pompey's death spread along  
the shore, the sky rang to the beat of lament.  
Unprecedented was that mourning; unknown  
to any age such grief of a people for the great.  
Yet when Cornelia disembarked from her ship,  
her eyes weary with weeping, her hair falling  
loose over her face, they redoubled their blows,  
in renewed sorrow. When she had reached that  
welcoming shore, she gathered up the clothes  
and insignia of her poor Magnus, the weapons,  
the gilded robes he had once worn, the togas  
embroidered in many colours, robes Jupiter  
saw him wear thrice in triumph; and set them  
all on a funeral pyre. To her they did sad duty  
as her husband's relics. All the pious followed  
her example, and pyres were raised all along  
the shore, lit for those who died in Thessaly.  
So Garganus, Vulture's fields, and the mild  
pastures of Matinus glitter when the Apulians  
burn the stubble to fertilise the soil on their

close-cropped plains, and grow fresh grass  
for winter herbage. No tribute so welcome  
to the shade of Pompey was uttered (though  
all dared to cry against heaven, and to blame  
the gods for Pompey's death) as Cato's words,  
few, but rising from a heart filled with truth:  
'This dead citizen, though far inferior to our  
ancestors in knowledge of the lawful limits,  
yet served our generation, which has shown  
scant reverence for justice; though powerful,  
defending liberty; alone remaining a private  
citizen when a nation sought to be his slaves;  
leader of a senate that yet ruled. He made no  
claim by right of force; wishing that others  
might have the power to refuse him what he  
wished; he possessed vast wealth but gave  
more than he retained. He took up the sword  
knowing how to lay it down. He preferred  
military service to public life, but, armed,  
still loved peace; he was pleased to accept  
leadership, and pleased to resign its power.  
His household was chaste and free of luxury,  
never corrupted by its master's fortune. His  
name is known and revered among nations,  
and he did much service to our own state.  
True belief in liberty died long ago, once  
Marius and Sulla were admitted to Rome:  
But now Pompey is lost from the world,  
even the fiction of freedom has perished.  
None who rule in future need feel shame,  
blush to usurp power, or abuse the Senate  
as a front. O happy was he, whose ending  
followed on defeat, the Egyptian swords  
offering the death he should have sought.  
He might perhaps have lived on instead  
under Caesar's rule, yet the highest fate  
is to know when to die, and the second



best to have such death forced upon one.  
As for myself, if fate should place me  
in another's power, Fortune, let Juba  
prove such a host; I am not unwilling  
to be detained at the enemy's pleasure,  
so long as my head too is first severed.'

### **Book IX:215-252 Pompey's men prepare to defect**

Greater honour in death was thus rendered  
the noble shade, than if Rome's Rostrum  
had sounded out his praises. But the men  
were soon loud with discord, weary, now  
Pompey was dead, of war and the camp.  
Then King Tarcondimotus of Cilicia gave  
the signal for deserting Cato. He readied  
his ships for flight, but Cato followed him  
to the shore and rebuked him, in these words:  
'O Cilician, never pacified, do you sail again  
to plunder the shipping? Fate has removed  
Pompey, and now you can return as a pirate  
to the high seas!' Then he gazed at all those  
who were gathered in flight, but one whose  
intention was clear addressed the commander:  
'Forgive us, Cato, our love of Pompey led us  
to arm, not civil conflict, and we took sides  
out of favour to him. But he lies low, whom  
the world preferred to peace, and our cause  
has perished; let us return to our native land,  
the homes we left, and the children we love.  
What end will there ever be to this warfare,  
if not Pharsalia and Pompey's death? Our  
life's effort has been lost; let our last days look  
forward to the proper rites, since civil conflict  
cannot even grant its leaders graves. Defeated,  
no barbarous rule awaits us, savage Fortune  
threatens me with no Scythian or Armenian

slavery; I pass into the civil power of Rome. Whoever was second while Pompey lived shall now be first, for me. I shall pay high honour to the sacred dead; I shall own to the master defeat forces on me, yet own to no leader, but you, Magnus: you alone I followed to war, now you are dead I will follow fate; since no hope of good fortune exists for me, nor is allowed. All fortune follows Caesar; his victory has scattered the forces in Thessaly; the wretched have lost belief, and he alone in all the world has power and will to grant the defeated life. Civil engagement was loyalty while Pompey lived, treachery now he is dead. If you, Cato, are always faithful to your country's laws, and your homeland, then let us seek the standard a Roman consul bears.' So saying, he leapt on board his vessel, with a disordered swarm of men.

### **Book IX:253-293 Cato wins them over**

The Roman cause seemed as good as lost, and the shore seethed with masterless men, but speech broke from Cato's sacred lips: 'Soldiers, it seems you fought for the same reason as others, for tyranny, for Pompey and not for Rome. You now, who no longer labour for a kingdom, whose lives are your own and not your leader's, who work to gain the world for none and may safely win it for yourselves alone; you flee the fight, and seek a yoke now your necks are free, unable to live without a master. Yet you have a cause now worthy of brave men. Pompey was able to abuse your powers, now freedom is in sight

do you refuse to fight, to die for your country?  
Of the triumvirate only one remains. Shame  
on you! Egypt's Pharaoh and Parthian bows  
have done more for the rule of law than you.  
Depart, degenerates, spurning Ptolemy's gift  
to you and your own weapons. Who would  
have ever thought your hands had dealt death?  
Caesar will think you were quick to flee to him,  
the first to take flight from Thessalian Pharsalia.  
Go with impunity; worthy to render yourselves  
to Caesar's justice, who neither siege nor arms  
conquered. O vile slaves, after your former  
master's death, you run to his heir. Why not  
seek a greater prize than mere life and pardon?  
Seize Magnus' unhappy wife, that daughter  
of Metellus, carry her overseas; lead Pompey's  
sons captive, and outdo Ptolemy's munificence!  
Whoever bears my head to the hated tyrant will  
win no small reward: from the price on my head  
your men will know they did well to follow my  
standard. So rouse yourselves, gain merit from  
that heinous crime; flight is the sin of cowards!'  
With this speech he recalled all the ships without  
exception from the waves. So, when hosts of bees  
depart the hive, where their young have hatched,  
they neglect the waxy cells, their wings no longer  
brush one another, each takes its own way, idling,  
refraining now from sipping the flowering thyme  
with its bitter taste; yet if the sound of Phrygian  
cymbals rises, they interrupt their flight, in alarm,  
returning to the performance of their flowery task,  
and their love of gathering pollen. The shepherd  
in Hybla's meadows is relieved, delighted that  
his honey harvest is secured. So Cato's speech  
persuaded his men to endure the lawful conflict.

## **Book IX:294-347 The fleet reaches Lake Tritonis**

Now he resolved to keep these men busy, who could not bear quiet, with endless tasks and military action. First the soldiers tired themselves shifting sand on the shore. Their next task was against the ramparts and walls of Cyrene. Cato took no revenge for his being refused entry, the sole punishment exacted on the defeated was defeat. Then he chose to sail to Juba's Libyan realm, bordering Moorish lands, though Nature barred their way, the Syrtes lying between: the bold and brave hoped to defeat her. When Nature first gave shape to the world, she left sea and land to dispute the Syrtes, the earth not low enough there to admit the water, nor high enough to defend itself from the waves, so the region is an uncertain waste, shallows broken by shoals, land cut off by the waters, and the breakers sound on strand after strand, so harshly has Nature abandoned her creation asking nothing of it. Or else perhaps Syrtis once lay beneath deeper water, far beneath, but the sunlight of the torrid zone evaporated the ocean, sucking up the water, and though the sea still resists being conquered by the sun with fierce heat over lengths of injurious time Syrtis will be dry land. Already the waves that cover it are shallow, and doomed to disappear. No sooner had oars begun to drive the sluggish vessels through the waves, when a southerly storm arose with dense rain. Blowing from its own realm, defending the waters, where the ships sailed, with a tempest, it now drove the waves far from Syrtes, and interspersed the sea with land. It tore the sails from any ship with mast still standing, the rigging straining in vain to oppose the wind, while

the canvas torn from the sailors' grasp blew  
from the ship, its folds flapping at the prow.  
Any prudent captain who ran with his sails  
brailed to the yard was driven off course,  
defeated, under bare poles. Those vessels  
met a better fate that rode over deep water,  
tossed on a sea that was sea. But any ship  
lightened by cutting the masts away, so  
leaving the blasts of wind to scourge it,  
was driven, helplessly, on a strong tide,  
in an opposing direction to the gale; a tide  
that carried it away and victoriously thrust  
it against that countervailing southerly.  
Such were left stranded in the shallows,  
where the sea, eating at the land, wrecked  
them, exposed to a twin danger, being  
half-aground half-floating on the waves.  
Then, driven further on-shore they struck  
against dry land, which emerged as the sea  
fell, for the waves raised by the southerly  
often failed to lift above the sandbanks.  
Far from the grassy shore, these ramparts  
of sand, rising from the depths, defied  
the waters; the wretched sailors stuck  
fast, their keels aground, far from shore.  
So the sea destroyed part of the fleet,  
but the larger part, answering the helm,  
were saved by flight, and finding pilots  
familiar with that coast, they reached  
its sluggish Lake Tritonis, unharmed.

#### **Book IX:348-410 Lake Tritonis: Cato's speech**

The lake, as story tells, is dear to the god,  
who is heard on every shore blowing his  
sounding shell over the waves, and dear  
also to Pallas who, born from her father's

head, alighted first in Libya, whose hot climate shows it most aligned to heaven: there she stood on the lakeshore and saw her face in the still waters, calling herself after the lake, in delight at its far expanse. Nearby, Lethe's stream silently steals past, which, they say, brings forgetfulness from the depths of the underworld, and there is the Garden of the Hesperides, once guarded by the sleepless dragon, now despoiled, its branches rifled. Invidious, those who decry the myths of ancient times, those who demand truth of poets. For there was once a golden grove, its branches heavy with a wealth of burnished fruit; a band of virgins its custodians; and a dragon, its eyes doomed never to close in sleep, coiled about the trees bowed by the metal. But Hercules relieved them of their task, and their precious burden, leaving branches robbed of their rich weight, carrying off those shining apples for the king of Argos. Now, the ships, off course, driven from the Syrtes, clinging to the Libyan waters, lingered on a more favourable coastline, with Gnaeus in command. But bold Cato impatient to move, trusting in the soldiers, dared to commit them to unknown lands, and bypass the Syrtes on foot. Winter too persuaded him, by closing the high seas to the fleet; while rain was a benefit to men who feared excessive heat, and the passage would be less harsh without burning sun or freezing cold, Libya's climate tempered by winter. Before entering the barren desert, Cato addressed his troops with this speech: 'O you who choose the true path, to follow

my standards to the death, heads unbowed,  
prepare yourselves for a feat of high courage,  
and supreme hardship. We will march through  
wastelands in an earthly furnace, where the sun  
pours down endless heat, where there is rarely  
water in the gullies, and the dry ground seethes  
with venomous snakes. Hard is the path to law,  
and a love of a ruined country. Let those march  
on through the heart of Libya, finding a pathless  
route, who have not a thought for turning back,  
for whom it is enough to go onwards. For I have  
no intent to deceive any man, nor draw the army  
on by concealing danger. Let my companions be  
those whom danger itself attracts, who, myself  
as witness, think it glorious in a Roman to endure  
even the worst. But any man who seeks a guarantee  
of survival, tempted by life's sweetness, let him  
take the honeyed path to tyranny. I shall be first  
to tread the desert, first to set my feet in the dust,  
let the sky's heat strike me, the poisonous snake  
confront me; so test the danger first by my fate.  
Let him thirst who sees me drink, or feel the heat,  
who sees me seek the shade, or tire, who sees me  
ride when the army marches: or find anything to  
show whether I am the general or the plain soldier!  
Snakes, thirst, burning sand, are sweet to the brave;  
the tough delight in hardship; virtue finds joy in  
its degree of constancy. Libya alone, with all her  
ills, can prove that defeat makes no man unworthy.'  
So he stirred courage and love of toil in their fearful  
hearts, and began a march from which there would  
be no return, by forging a way through the desert;  
Libya determined an uncaring Cato's fate, Libya  
destined to inter his name in a humble grave.

## **Book IX:411-462 North Africa**

Africa is a third of everything, if you are willing, on the whole, to credit report; yet if you judge by wind and weather, it is part of Europe, since the banks of the Nile are no further than the Don is from Cadiz in the far west, where Europe and Africa are separated, and their coasts make room for the sea to enter; while Asia alone is a larger portion of the world. It takes Europe and Africa together to pour out the west wind, while Asia, feeling the northerlies on one side, southerlies on the other, alone owns the winds of the east. The fertile part of Africa is towards the west, though even there the land is devoid of rivers, and receives scant rain when northerlies blow and our temperate climate refreshes its fields. It is not worked for riches; neither copper nor gold are smelted, its untouched soil is still pure earth below. The people are rich in nothing but Mauretania's timber, which they have no idea how to use, content to live in the citrus-tree's leafy shade. Our axes have invaded the virgin groves, we seek wood for our tables as well as foodstuffs from the ends of the earth. But that coast which embraces shifting Syrtes, lying beneath the parching sun under a burning sky, burns the crops, smothers the vines with dust, and no roots bind the crumbling soil. Living things lack temperate air, Jove cares nothing for the rainless land below; nature is torpid, the unmoving sand experiences no seasons. Yet this barren land produces a scattering of grass, cut by the Nasamonians, a hardy race who live in nakedness along the coast, while cruel Syrtes sends them the world's salvage; for the wreckers wait on the sandy



shore, familiar with trade-goods though no vessel harbours there; through shipwrecks they sample the commerce of all nations! Cato's stern virtue bade him march there. And there the soldiers, expecting no gales or tempest on land, endured the equivalent of those at sea. For the southerlies blow more fiercely on the dry coast of the Syrtes than over the deep, and are more damaging. Libya has no mountains to break their force, no tall cliffs to oppose and dissipate them, turning the fierce gusts to tranquil breezes; nor do they meet forest, weary themselves bowing ancient oaks: the whole land is flat, and an Aeolian fury freely scourges the desert. There is no moisture in the whirling clouds of dust, driven violently in spirals, a vast amount of sand is raised and, merged with the air, never falls. The poor Nasamonians see their possessions fly in the wind, their huts razed; the Garamantians, unhoused, see their roofs snatched up and blown away. Flames are smothered; as high as the smoke rises to darken day the dust is already there.

#### **Book IX:463-510 The sandstorm**

Now the wind attacked the Roman columns more fiercely than ever, the men staggering, unable to find a footing, the very sand they stood on being blown away. If the Libyan land was solid, with a ponderous weight of cliffs that confined the southerlies in cavernous spaces, the winds would shake the earth, wrench the globe from its place; but because the drifting sand is so easily disturbed, the ground offers no resistance,

earth below solid, while its surface is bared.  
The storm, blowing violently, snatched at  
the men's javelins, shields and helmets,  
whirling them fiercely through the sky's  
great void, perhaps to fall, like a portent,  
in some remote and distant country, men  
there fearful of armour from the heavens,  
thinking a gift of the gods what was torn  
from men's grasp. Surely those sacred shields  
that fell around Numa as he made sacrifice,  
which elders elect now carry on their shoulders  
were stripped from their owners by the south  
or north winds, and in that way became ours.  
Now, as the wind tormented the world thus,  
the Roman soldiers flung themselves down,  
fearful of being blown away, and buckling  
their armour tight, they clutched the ground,  
strength as well as weight holding them there,  
barely surviving the storm, that roiled vast  
piles of sand over them, burying their bodies  
in the dirt. Crushed by the weight, they could  
scarcely rise from the ground. Ramparts of sand  
kept them anchored where they stood, prevented  
from moving by the surging dust. The storm  
broke down walls, tore out the stones within,  
and dropped them far off, a strange quirk of fate  
when, seeing no houses, people saw their ruins  
fall from the sky. Now the route was totally  
obscured, devoid of landmarks, and they found  
their way by the stars; though the regions of sky  
that cover the lands of North Africa did not show  
all the usual constellations, many being concealed  
below the horizon. At dawn it grew burning hot,  
the sun's heat expanding the air compressed by  
the storm; sweat poured from their bodies, their  
mouths parched with thirst. A meagre trickle of  
a stream was found some way off, and a soldier

filled the hollow of his helm with water, won with care from the sand, then offered it to his general. Every mouth was dry with dust, so that their leader holding the least drop in his hands, was an object of envy. 'Do you, you rascal, think me the only man lacking fortitude in this army? Do I seem soft as that, unequal to the first blaze of heat? What a fitting punishment for you that would be, made to drink, as all round you thirst!' Thus provoked to anger he emptied out the helm, and left what water there was to suffice for all.

**Book IX:511-586 The Temple of Ammon (*The oracle of Amun at Siwa*)**

They came to the shrine of the crude Garamantians, the only temple the Libyan tribes possess. They say Jupiter has an oracle there, but Ammon, unlike our god, never wields the lightning bolt, and has curved horns. It is no rich temple the Libyan peoples have built there, no altars resplendent with eastern gems. Though the Ethiopians and others, and the wealthy tribes of Arabs, have but one god, Jupiter Ammon, yet their god is a pauper, his temple has remained untainted by riches throughout the centuries, while the deity, in ancient mode, now defends his shrine against Roman gold. Yet the heavenly powers are attested by an oasis of trees, the only broad grove in the Libyan desert. All the expanse of arid sand that separates burning Berenice (*Benghazi*) from more temperate Leptis Magna (*Lebda*) is devoid of foliage; Ammon appropriated the only grove. A local spring feeds the trees, binding the dusty soil, its waters cementing the subjugated sands. Yet even here nothing hinders the sun, when that orb of light balances at the zenith, the trees barely darkening their trunks, so small the arc of shadow thrown by its rays. This the region, we find, where

the sun at solstice is almost overhead at midday. The shadows of whatever people you may be who are separated from us by these Libyan tropics, fall southwards, where ours fall northwards. Slowly the Little Bear ascends for you, and you may suppose our un-wetted Wain to sink in the sea, and every star overhead meet the ocean; either pole equidistant, the Zodiac's constellations sweep through the zenith. They do not move obliquely, Scorpio is as upright as Taurus, on rising; Aries gives nothing away to Libra; nor does Virgo cause Pisces to set more gradually. Sagittarius rises high as Gemini, rain-bringing Capricorn as burning Cancer, Leo as Aquarius. Messengers from the east stood before the doors of the shrine, seeking to learn the future from the oracle of horned Jupiter; but they gave way to the Roman general, his officers begging Cato to try the oracle, famed throughout North Africa, and to pass judgement on its ancient reputation. Labienus, in particular, urged him to question the future by means of the divine voice. 'Chance,' he said, 'and the fortunes of the way present the word of the great god and his wisdom to us; we can enjoy his guidance through the Syrtes, and discover the outcome appointed for the war. I cannot believe the heavens would reveal their mysteries and dictate the truth more to any man than virtuous Cato. Have you not always ruled your life according to heavenly law, a follower of the divine? Now behold you are free to speak with Jove: ask as to the fate of that abomination Caesar, and view the future state of our country: Will the people enjoy their laws and freedoms, or has the civil war been all in vain? Fill your breath with the god's voice; a lover of harsh virtues should at least seek where virtue lies,

and demand to see the likeness of goodness.’ Then Cato, filled with the god that he bore concealed in his heart, poured out a speech worthy of the oracle itself: ‘What question would you have me ask, Labienus? Whether I would rather die, a free man, in battle, than see a tyrant in power? Whether it matters if a life is long or short? Whether power can ever harm the good; if fate threatens virtue in vain; whether the desire for the laudable is enough, and virtue no greater for success? The answers to these things I know; Ammon cannot instil them more deeply in my mind. We are all close to the divine; let the oracle be dumb, we do nothing without the gods’ will it. The powers above have no need for speech; whatever we are permitted to know our maker told us once and for all at birth. Did he choose these barren sands, so only a few might hear his voice, burying all truth in this desert? Has he any dwelling place but earth, sea, air, heaven and the virtuous? Why seek the gods beyond? Whatever you see, whatever you do, is Jove. Let those seek oracles who doubt, forever anxious about what it is to come: no oracle can grant me certainty, but only the certainty of death. The coward and the brave man both die: let that be enough, Jove has said.’ With that, he departed, leaving the oracle’s reputation still intact, and Ammon, untried, for the tribes to worship there at their altars.

### **Book IX:587-618 Cato’s leadership**

Cato now led his gasping soldiers on foot, carrying his javelin in his hand, issuing

no orders, showing them how to endure hardship, shunning being carried on men's shoulders, or riding in a cart; sleeping less than any; and when a spring was found, and the thirsty men must queue and gaze, he waited till the last camp-follower had drunk. If true merit accrues great honour, and naked virtue is separate from success, whatever we praise regarding our ancestors mere Fortune granted. Who has deserved greater fame, simply by winning wars, by shedding the blood of nations? For I would rather have led that triumph through farthest Libya and the Syrtes, than climb the Capitol thrice in Pompey's chariot, strangle Jugurtha in his prison. Behold, the true father of his country, a man worthy to be worshipped, Rome, at your altars; by whom none need blush to swear, and who, if you ever free your neck from the yoke, shall be made a god. Now the heat increased, they trod the sands beyond which the heavens decree no living thing can endure noon, and water was scarcer. A lone spring was found deep in the desert, flowing with water, but guarded by such a host of serpents the place could scarcely hold them. Parched *asps* held the margin, while thirsting *dipsades* filled the pool. Seeing the men would die if they shunned the water, Cato gave speech: 'Men, do not hesitate to drink, they are harmless, the threat of death that terrifies you is illusory. Snake venom is only deadly in the bloodstream; The fangs threaten death, the poison is in their bite, but there is no death in the drinking cup.' So saying, he drank the suspect liquid, and this was the only spring in all the Libyan desert where Cato chose to taste the water first.

## **Book IX:619-699 The tale of Perseus and Medusa**

No care or labour of ours will serve to reveal why the Libyan climate breeds such pest, and teems with deathly creatures, what secret noxiousness Nature has mixed with its soil; though a vulgar fable has concealed the true cause from all men everywhere. At the far western limits of Africa, where the burning earth receives an Ocean heated by the setting sun, lay the wide, untilled land of Medusa, Phorcys' daughter, a land without shade of tree, unworked by the plough, but harsh with the stone produced by their mistress' gaze. Within her body nature first bred those savage pests, from her throat slid those snakes, hissing fiercely with strident tongues. They lashed about the neck of Medusa, delighting her; those vipers flowing down her back, rearing up at her brow, in the fashion of woman's hair; oozing venom when the tresses were combed. These were all of unhappy Medusa men viewed with impunity; for who had time to fear the monstrous face, her gaping maw, when whoever looked straight into that face, Medusa caused their death? For she forestalled all fear, hastening the fatal moment, the limbs transformed while breath yet lingered, the shade imprisoned hardening beneath the bones. The tresses of the Furies merely brought madness; Cerberus softened his growling when Orpheus played; and Hercules could watch the Hydra as he slew it; but even Phorcys, second to Neptune her own father, in ruling the sea, feared Medusa, as did her mother, Ceto, and her sister Gorgons; she had power to threaten sea and sky with rare paralysis, and clothe the world with stone. Birds suddenly heavy fell from the sky; wild creatures

froze to the rocks; and whole tribes of Ethiopians around were turned to statues. Nothing living could endure her gaze, and even the Gorgon's serpents all reared backwards to avoid her face. She turned Atlas, the Titan, he who supports the Pillars of the West to a craggy mountain; and when the gods long ago dreaded the Giants with serpent legs, she changed them at Phlegra to lofty summits, the Gorgon ending that fearful battle, she who adorns the centre of Pallas' *aegis*. To this land Perseus came, he who had sprung from Danae's womb, sired by a shower of gold. He flew with winged feet, as Arcadian Mercury, the god who gave us the lyre, and wrestler's oil. When he suddenly raised the Cyllenian scimitar, red with another monster's blood, after he had slain Argus, guard of Io the heifer, Jupiter's love, virgin Pallas brought aid to her winged brother. She bargained for the Gorgon's head, ordering Perseus, on reaching the border of Libya to turn towards the rising sun and fly backwards through the Gorgon's realm: she also set a gleaming shield of tawny bronze on his left arm, and told him only to view Medusa, who turned all to stone, therein. Sleep had overcome Medusa, and yet not wholly, a sleep that would bring death's eternal slumber; many of the serpents, her tresses, were vigilant, and those hydra locks reared forward to defend her head; the others shrouded her eyes and face. Now Pallas herself directed the speeding Perseus; her right hand guided the quivering Cyllenian scimitar, which Perseus brandished, face averted, severing the snaky head where it joined the neck. What a look the Gorgon's face must have had, after her neck was sliced by the curving blade! What foul venom was expelled from her mouth, and how death must have flowed from her eyes!



Even Pallas could not view her, and that gaze  
would have frozen Perseus' backward glance,  
had not Pallas veiled it with that snaky host.  
So, seizing the Gorgon's head, he leapt towards  
the sky. He thought to shorten the route, lessen  
his journey, by flying over inhabited Europe,  
but Pallas ordered him to avoid fertile lands,  
and spare the populace, for who might not gaze  
at the sky when such things flew past? And so,  
the hero flew east and passed over Libya, free  
of cultivation, exposed to sky and sun, whose  
path overhead parches the soil; earth's shadow  
at night nowhere higher in the sky, eclipsing  
the moon, forgetful of her slanting orbit, when  
she follows the zodiac neither north or south  
of that shadow. Though those lands are sterile,  
fecund with no good seed, they drank venom  
from the blood-wet dripping head of Medusa,  
soaked with the foul dew of that savage blood,  
distilled by heat, and dyeing the putrid sand.

### **Book IX:700-760 The Libyan serpents**

The first of the plagues of snakes that ever raised its  
heads above the sand there, was of swollen-necked  
sleep-inducing *asps*. Their throats are fuller with blood  
and thick venom; in no snake is it more concentrated.  
Loving heat, never travelling to cold regions, they lurk  
in the sands stretching to the Nile. Yet we – are we  
ever ashamed of chasing profit? – import Africa's  
bane into Italy, and make the asp an article of trade.  
There too the huge *haemorrhoids*, which causes its  
victims to bleed to death, unfolds its scaly coils;  
and the *chersydros* inhabiting the uncertain Syrtes;  
the *chelydrus* leaving a trail of smoke; the *cenchrus*,  
that glides in a straight line, its belly more stained  
and chequered than Theban serpentine, in intricate

patterns. Then there is the *ammodytes*, its colour indistinguishable from scorched sand; the *cerastes*, moving with curving spine; the *cytale* that sheds its skin only when the frost still coats the ground; the parched *dipsas*; the fell *amphisbaena*, its two heads facing each other; the *natrix* that poisons wells; and the flying *iaculus*; the *parias* content to plough a furrow with its tail; the greedy *prester*, distended with foaming jaws; the wasting *seps* that dissolves both flesh and bone; and the *basilisk* that threatens all other snakes with the hisses it pours out, killing before its venom, compelling the host to keep their distance, and ruling the empty sands. You dragons too, glittering with golden sheen, that crawl, divine and harmless, through all other lands, burning Africa renders deadly; you draw the air of heaven to you with your wings, then pursuing whole herds of cattle, coil round mighty bulls and crush them with blows from your tails; nor are elephants saved by their bulk: you consign all things to death, and need no venom to destroy. Cato and his hardy soldiers marched among these pests on the waterless way, witnessing the cruel fate of man after man, strange manners of dying from the slightest of wounds. Thus Aulus, a lad of Etruscan blood, and a standard-bearer, trod on a *dipsas* that reared back its head and bit him. He scarcely felt the bite, was free of pain, the wound not dangerous in appearance, nor threatening any injurious effect. Behold, the hidden venom rises, devouring heat seizes the marrow, and scorches the innards with wasting heat. The poison drank the humours about the vital organs, and began to wither the tongue in his parched mouth. No sweat ran down the weakened limbs, no flow of tears wet the eyes. Neither a soldier's pride, nor Cato's command halted the burning man,

who dared to hurl away the standard, wildly  
seeking water anywhere the scorching venom  
at his heart demanded. He would have burned  
though plunged in the Don, the Rhone, the Po,  
though he drank of the Nile's flood in the fields.  
Libya's climate empowers death, and given  
that scorching soil, the *dipsas* deserves less  
credit for its powers. Men go seeking water  
deep in the barren sand, then run to the Syrtes  
and swallow brine; the liquid wave brings relief,  
but not enough. Thinking it merely thirst, Aulus,  
not feeling the nature of his hurt, deadly venom,  
ventured to open a swollen vein with his sword,  
and then filled his mouth with his own blood.

#### **Book IX:761-788 The death of Sabellus**

Cato quickly ordered the standards onward: none  
was allowed to see what thirst could drive a man  
to do. Yet a sadder death than that of Aulus occurred  
before their eyes, as a tiny *seps* pierced the unlucky  
Sabellus' leg, and clung there with its barbed fangs;  
he tore it free, pinning it to the sand with his spear.  
Though small, no other snake deals such cruel death,  
for the broken skin near the wound shrank all round,  
showing white bone until, as the opening widened,  
all was one bare fleshless wound. The limbs swam  
with corruption, the calves melted, the knees were  
stripped of tissue, the sinews of the thighs melted,  
and a black discharge issued from the groin. Then  
the membrane holding the guts snapped, the bowels  
spilling out. Less than a whole body slid to the sand,  
for the cruel venom dissolved the limbs, and death  
reduced the total to a little pool of slime. What a  
man consists of is shown by the poison's unholy  
nature: the strictures of ligaments, the texture of  
the lungs, the hollow of the chest, all the vital

organs conceal is laid bare in death. The mighty arms and shoulders melt, head and neck liquefy, faster than snow fades and runs in a warm south wind, or wax in the sun. Not only, I say, is flesh consumed, and rendered down by the venom, which fire can also do, but the bones vanish too, which no pyre achieves, with the putrid marrow, leaving not a trace behind of so rapid a death. Among the snakes of Africa, *seps*, you win death's palm, all take life, you alone the body!

### **Book IX:789-838 Further deaths by snake-bite**

Behold, now, a manner of death in contrast to liquefaction. Nasidius, earlier a farmer in Marsian fields, was struck by a red hot *prester*. His face burned fiery red, the skin was stretched, all features lost in the swelling tumour; then as the powerful venom worked the corruption spread over all his limbs, inflated far beyond any human frame, the man himself buried deep within his bloated body, his breastplate unable to contain the distension of his swollen chest. The cloud of hissing steam pours out less fiercely from a heated cauldron; canvas sails fill less in a gale. The body no longer contained the swelling, now a shapeless globule, the trunk a featureless mass. Left untouched by the carrion birds, no beast feeding there with impunity, the soldiers dared not give the corpse to the flames, but took flight, leaving it still swelling, its growth not yet done. The Libyan snakes produced still greater marvels. Tullus, a brave youth who admired Cato, was bitten by a fierce *haemorrhoids*. As Corycian saffron-water can be made to spout from every part of a statue at once, so all his members shed venomous crimson instead of blood. His tears

ran blood; blood flowed copiously from every orifice of his body; his mouth and nostrils filled with it; his sweat was red; all his limbs streamed with the content of his veins; his whole body was one wound. Then a Nile serpent froze your blood luckless Laevus, and stopped your heart. No pang bore witness to the bite, the darkness of death fell suddenly, in sleep you joined the friendly shades. Even the poisonous plants the seers of Sais pluck, whose deadly stems resemble the Sabaean stalks steeped in the cup, never brought so swift a death. Behold too, a fierce snake, the Libyans call *iaculus*, reared and launched itself from a barren tree nearby, pierced Paulus' head through the temples, and fled. No venom acted there; death took him too suddenly. Then they saw how slow a stone from the sling flies, how sluggish the flight of Parthian arrows in the air. What matter that wretched Murrus drove his spear through the *basilisk*? The venom coursed through the weapon, seized on his hand; at once he bared his sword and, at a stroke, sliced hand from arm, standing there, as it stilled, watching a manner of death that would have been his own. And who would dream a scorpion powerful enough to cause swift death, yet the sky bears witness that Scorpio, with bulbous tail and menacing sting erect, bears the glory of defeating Orion! And who would fear to tread on the *salpuga* ant's nest? Yet even to such the Stygian Fates gave power over the spun thread.

#### **Book IX:839-889 The soldiers' heroic endurance**

Thus neither bright day nor dark night brought sleep to the wretched men, fearful of the earth they lay on. Lacking heaped-up leaves or piles of straw for beds, they lay on the ground, exposed to the risk of death, their warmth attracting snakes chilled by night cold,

their limbs heating the mouthing creatures, harmless while their venom was frozen. They lacked all idea of how far they had come, or the distance yet to go, with only the stars as guides, and often complained: 'You gods, bring back Pharsalia; return us the field from which we fled. Sworn to wield the sword, why do we suffer a coward's death? The *dipsas* fights for Caesar, the *cerastes* wins the civil war. Let us travel the torrid zone instead, where the sun's steeds scorch the sky; happy to perish by fiery air, slain by heaven. We do not complain of you Nature, or you, Africa; you took a region bearing monstrosities and granted it to the serpents, and condemned a soil, unsuitable for crops, to lie untilled, devoid of men to be bitten. We came to this land of snakes; receive our penance, whatever power you are that, loathing our commerce, bounded this region with a zone of fire to the south, the shifting Syrtes northwards, and death in between. Through your solitary reaches civil war marches on, and we soldiers, now knowing this hidden world, beat on the gates of the west. Perhaps worse things await us, once there: the sun and hissing water will meet, and nature be burdened by heaven; and that way no land lies other than Juba's gloomy realm, known to us by report. Perhaps we shall regret this snaky land: its climate brings one solace, that life exists here still. We do not seek our native fields, not Europe, or Asia under alien suns: yet by what corner of earth and sky did we leave Africa? But now, winter gripped Cyrene; can one short march destroy the cycle of the seasons? We are marching towards the other pole, exiles from our world, our backs turned for a fresh wind to strike; perhaps Rome itself is now underneath our feet. We seek solace in our plight: let our enemies come, let Caesar follow where we flee!' So stubborn patience eases its burden of complaint. They were forced to suffer such hardship by the virtue of their leader,

who kept watch lying on the bare sand, challenging fate at every moment. Alone he was present at every death; whenever they call, he goes, and confers that mighty benefit, more than life: the courage to die; so that, with him as witness, any man was ashamed to die with a groan on his lips. What power did that plague of creatures have over him? He conquered death in another's heart, and taught as he gazed on the dying, that its pain possessed no great power.

### **Book IX:890-937 The Psylli combat the snakes**

Tardily, Fortune, weary of inflicting such trials, brought help to the wretched. One African tribe alone are immune to the bite of those cruel snakes, namely the Psylli of Marmarica. Their spittle acts like powerful herbs, their blood is protected, no poison gaining admittance, even without the use of charms. The nature of this region has dictated that they live unharmed in the midst of serpents; they benefit from being surrounded by venom, as death grants them a pass. They rely greatly on selectivity in breeding: when an infant is newly born, fearful of some admixture of foreign blood, they test the babe in question with a venomous asp. As Jupiter's eagle, when its featherless chicks are hatched from the warm egg, turns them to the rising sun; those who can endure the rays, gazing straight into its light, being saved to serve the god, while those who cannot being discarded; so the Psylli take it as a sign of purity if the infant is unafraid of serpents, treating the given snake as a plaything. Not content with protecting themselves alone, they look out for strangers, and help others against those deadly creatures. Thus they accompanied the Roman army, and when Cato ordered the tents to be pitched, they first purified the sand at the designated site,

banishing the snakes with spells and incantations. Fumigating fires surrounded the camp, dwarf-elder crackled there, and imported aromatic gum bubbled; the thinly-leaved tamarisk, Eastern costus (*saussurea*), powerful all-heal, and Thessalian centaury, hog's fennel (*peucedanum*), and Sicilian mullein (*thapsus*) hissed in the flames, and larch wood, and bitter southernwood (*artemisia abrotanum*) whose smoke the snakes loathe; with the horns of deer from distant parts. So the soldiers were protected at night: but if any were bitten near to death by day, then the magical powers of this wondrous people were seen, a mighty battle between the Psylli and the venomous bite ensues. They first mark the flesh with a touch of saliva that halts the poison, confining it to the wound, then their foaming lips chant many a spell, a continuous murmur, for the surge of venom allows no pause for breath, not one moment's silence in the face of death. Often the pestilence is expelled from the blackened marrow by incantation; but when the poison is slower to shift, and resists eradication, then they lean down and lick at the yellowish wound, draining the flesh and sucking the venom out through their teeth, until victoriously they extract all the fatal fluid from the chill flesh, spitting it from their mouths. The Psylli are quick to know by the poisonous taste what kind of snake it was whose bite was overcome.

#### **Book IX:938-986 Caesar visits the site of Troy**

Saved by their help, the Romans now wandered far and wide over the barren plains. Rising and setting, the moon twice went from full to full, while Cato was lost in the desert, but now he felt the sand grow ever firmer under his feet, and Africa was once more solid ground. And now the foliage of scattered trees appeared in the distance, and rough huts compacted of straw. How those soldiers rejoiced to reach a safer



region, where only fierce lions now confronted them! Leptis was nearby, and they spent all winter in those peaceful quarters, untroubled by the heat or storms. When Caesar, satiated with slaughter, left Pharsalia, he ignored all other projects and turned his attention wholly to Pompey. He followed his scattered traces on land in vain, until fresh report directed him to sea. He sailed the Thracian strait, by Hero's tower, through the narrows made famous by those lovers, the gloomy shores where Helle, Nephele's daughter, gave her name to the waters. No narrower stretch of water separates Europe from Asia, though the channel's slight by which the Euxine divides Byzantium from Chalcedon's oyster beds, and Propontis bears its waters through a little strait. An admirer of past fame, he sought out Sigeum's sands Simois' stream, Rhoeteum noted for great Ajax' grave, and those of the many shades who owe a debt to poetry. He walked round the ruins of Troy of glorious name, seeking the mighty remnants of the walls Apollo raised. Now barren woods and their rotting tree-trunks burdened Priam's palace, the desiccated roots clutching the temples of the gods, Pergama wholly shrouded in thorns: the very ruins lost. He viewed Hesione's rock; and then Anchises' hidden marriage-chamber in the woods; and the cavern where Paris sat in judgement; and the place from which the lad, Ganymede, was snatched into the heavens; and the summit where Oenone, the naiad, lamented: a legend attached to every stone. The stream, snaking through dry dust, he crossed unknowingly, was Xanthus. Where he stepped idly through rank grass, and his Phrygian guide bade him not to tread, lay Hector's grave. And where scattered stones lay, with no appearance of sanctity, the man cried: 'Have you no respect for Zeus' altar?' O mighty the sacred labour of the poet! He rescues all from fate, and grants immortality to mortal beings. Caesar, let not your envy touch the sacred dead; for if our Latin Muses are permitted to promise anything,

those to come will read my verse, and read of you,  
and our Pharsalia shall live on, as long as Homer's  
fame endures, no age condemning us to the shadows.

### **Book IX:987-1063 Caesar sails to Egypt**

When Caesar had sated himself with those views  
of the ancient past, he swiftly raised a pile of turf  
as an altar, then he prayed, and not in vain, over  
the flames smoking with incense: 'You gods,  
of the dead, that inhabit the ruins of Troy; you  
household gods of my ancestor Aeneas which  
Lavinium and Alba now protect, upon whose  
altars Phrygian fire still glows; and you, image  
of Pallas, famous pledge of the city's safety,  
that no man may view, in your secret shrine;  
here in your ancient dwelling-place, I duly  
call on you, I, the most glorious descendant  
of Iulus' race, and, as is right, burn incense.  
Grant good fortune to the end of my journey,  
and I will restore your nation: in gratitude  
Italy will rebuild the Phrygian walls, and  
a Roman Troy shall rise.' So saying, he  
re-embarked, and spread billowing sails  
to a favourable wind. Driven by the gale,  
eager to offset his delay at Troy, he ran  
past mighty Asia Minor, leaving Rhodes  
behind in the foaming waves. A westerly  
never slackening the rigging, the seventh  
night revealed Pharos' flame, and Egypt.  
But day had dawned and hid that nocturnal  
beacon before he entered harbour, where  
the port was in uproar, a confused murmur  
of anxious voices, and so he kept aboard,  
fearing to trust so treacherous a kingdom.  
But a servant of the Pharaoh set out over  
the waves, bearing a vile gift, Pompey's

head wrapped in Egyptian linen, and first spoke infamously commending the crime: 'Conqueror of the world, and mightiest of the Roman people, though you knew it not you are now secure, your son-in-law is dead. Pharaoh spares you the toil of battle on land and sea, gifting the one thing lacking from Pharsalia's conflict. The civil war has ended while you sailed, for we slew Pompey as he sought to recover from the ruins of Thessaly. We repay you, Caesar, with this great pledge; with this death we seal our treaty with you. Receive, without bloodshed, the Pharaonic kingdom you sought; accept dominion over the Nile; accept all you would have given for Pompey's life; believe us worthy servants of your cause, whom fate wished to grant such power over your son-in-law. Nor must you think our deed worth little, that it was something that came easily. He was our friend of old, restoring the throne to our Pharaoh's banished father. What more is there to say? You shall put a name to this great action: ask what the world says of it. If it is called a crime, your debt to us is all the greater, since you did not commit it.' So saying he uncovered Pompey's head, and held it out in his hands. Relaxed in death the features of that famous countenance had altered. Caesar did not at first reject the gift, or avert his face; he gazed at it until he was certain; then, accepting at last that evidence of crime, thought it safe to play the loving father-in-law, shedding false tears, forcing groans from his breast, delight in his heart. He avoided showing joy, solely in this way denigrating his obligation to the vile tyrant,

choosing to grieve at his kinsman's severed head rather than own to a debt. He who with stony face trampled the corpses of senators, gazing dry-eyed at the aftermath of Pharsalia, dared not deny you, alone, Magnus, his tears. Oh, this the harshest blow of fate! Did you, Caesar, pursue the man in impious warfare only to weep for him at the last? Does that bond of kinship move you now? Do your daughter and your grandchild demand you to grieve then? Do you think it might serve your cause among the nations that love his name? Perhaps, touched by envy of Ptolemy, resentment that another held power over the body of captive Pompey, makes you groan; vengeance in battle lost, and your son-in-law snatched from the clutches of his arrogant conqueror? Whatever the motive for your weeping, it was far removed from true grief. Is that why you coursed over land and sea with purpose, to ensure your kinsman was not killed quietly? Well that death snatched him from your jurisdiction! How deep was the shame cruel Fortune saved Rome from; in that you, a traitor, were prevented from granting Magnus your pardon, while he lived! Yet Caesar dared to utter words of deceit, and gain credit for the sorrow in his face:

**Book IX:1064-1108 Caesar feigns grief at Pompey's death**

'You servants of the Pharaoh, remove his foul gift from my sight; your crime does greater disservice to Caesar than to Pompey; I am robbed of the sole privilege of civil war, that of granting life to a man defeated. If your Pharaoh did not hate his sister so, I might have sent him Cleopatra's head, returning

the kind of gift he deserves for such a one as this. Why did his sword-blade move secretly, why thrust his weapon into our business? Did Pharsalia's field grant rights to Macedonian steel? Was that my aim, that your king should do as he wished? Shall I, who would not allow Pompey to rule Rome with me, let Ptolemy do so? If there is any power on earth save Caesar's, if any land owns to more than one master, I will have troubled the world with civil war in vain. I might have steered the Roman fleet from your shore; care for my reputation prevented me, lest I were seen to fear blood-stained Egypt rather than condemn her. Do not think to deceive the victor: you would have welcomed me in that manner too, and only victory at Pharsalia ensures that my head's not treated thus. The risk that we ran in warfare was surely greater than I feared: I dreaded only exile, my kinsman's threats, and Rome; yet the punishment for defeat was Ptolemy's! Nevertheless, I spare his youth, and pardon his crime. Let the tyrant understand that there can be no greater gift than pardon for this killing. You must inter this great general's head, and not so that earth merely hides the crime: grant incense for a fitting burial, placate his spirit, collect his ashes strewn on the shore, and allow his scattered remains to be re-united in the urn. Let the dead know a kinsman is here; let his shade hear my voice of piety and sorrow. Because he preferred power above all to me, choosing to owe his death to his Egyptian puppet, the world is robbed of a joyful day, the nations have missed our moment of reconciliation. My prayer, Pompey, that I might lay down my weapons in success; embrace you, asking for your former affection and life; and, as sufficient reward for my labours, rest content to be yours; that prayer lacked favour with heaven. O then, in shared peace and trust,

I might have enabled you to forgive the gods  
my victory, while you enabled Rome to forgive  
me.' So he said, but found none to share his  
tears, nor did the onlookers believe his grief;  
they left off groaning, hiding their misgivings  
behind a joyful expression, and happily gazing  
at the blood-stained relic; daring to do so –  
O rare privilege – while Caesar mourned!

### **End of Book IX**

## **Book X:1-52 Alexander's grave**

As soon as Caesar, chasing Pompey, touched shore and trod those fateful sands, his destiny and that of guilty Egypt had contended as to whether that land under Macedonian rule would yield to Roman arms or an Egyptian sword take the victor's life not only the loser's. Your shade, Pompey, did good service; your ghost snatched your kinsman from death, lest Rome, despite your murder, be indebted to Egypt. Caesar, secure, transferred to Paraetionium (*Mersa Matruh*), with Egypt now attached to his cause by the bond of a ruthless crime, but found the people angered that Roman laws and officialdom should usurp their own, feelings split, support wavering, and that Pompey's death had brought him no gain. Yet undaunted, his face forever masking his fears, he visited the temples of the gods and the ancient sacred shrines, witnesses to former Macedonian greatness. He was charmed by neither the gold nor the ornaments of religion, nor by their city, but descended eagerly into the sepulchral vault where lay Alexander, Macedonian Philip's wild son, that chance marauder, whose sudden death solaced the world. His mortal parts that should have been scattered throughout the earth, were laid to rest in a holy shrine; fate spared his bones, imperial rule was destined to endure to the end. For, if the world had regained a shred of liberty his corpse would have been retained as an object of derision, not shown as an example to the world of how a host of lands were subjected to one man. He left his Macedonian obscurity, spurned Athens that his father had conquered, and spurred on by the power of destiny ran amok among the realms of Asia, slaying humankind, putting every land to the sword. He stained far-off rivers, Persia's

Euphrates, India's Ganges with blood; a plague on earth, a lightning bolt that struck all peoples alike, a fateful comet flaring over every nation. He was about to launch his fleet on the Ocean's encircling deep. Neither water nor fire, Syrtes nor barren Libya, nor Ammon himself stood in his way, for, following the earth's horizon he'd have reached the west, circled the poles, drunk the Nile at its source. Nature alone was able to bring his mad reign to an end; his last day came and jealously he stole away that power by which he conquered the world; he left no heir to all his greatness, but exposed the nations to ruin. Yet he died in Babylon, and Parthians feared him. For shame, that the East dreaded the Macedonian lance, far more than they now do the Roman javelin! Though we rule the home of the north wind and that of the west, and oppress those lands beyond the burning southerlies, yet in the east we yield to him who conquered the Parthians. Parthia so fateful for the Crassi, was merely a harmless province of tiny Macedonian Pella.

### **Book X:53-103 Caesar's infatuation with Cleopatra**

Now the boy-king came from the Pelusian mouth of the Nile, and calmed the anger of his unwarlike people; with the Pharaoh as his hostage for peace, Caesar was safe at the royal court. But the sister, Cleopatra, bribed the guards to release the chain across Pharos' harbour, disembarked her little two-oared vessel, and entered the royal palace without Caesar knowing; she, Egypt's shame, Latium's Fury, her un-chastity a bane to Rome. As the fatal beauty of Helen the Spartan harmed Argos and Troy, so Cleopatra increased Italy's



madness. Her *sistrum* even rattled the Capitol, dare one say, and with unwarlike Canopus she opposed our Roman standards, hoping to lead a captive Caesar in an Egyptian triumph. By Leucas, in Actium's bay, she cast doubt on whether a woman not of our race might rule the world. That night had fuelled her insolence, the night that first brought a wanton daughter of the Ptolemies to pollute a Roman general's bed. Who can refuse to pardon Mark Antony's wild infatuation, when even Caesar's unfeeling heart took fire? Even in the grip of his mad fury, in that palace haunted by Pompey's ghost, still drenched in the blood of Pharsalia, he tainted his thoughts with adulterous lust, mixed illicit lovemaking, bastard offspring, with the affairs of war. For shame! Forgetful of your adherents, Magnus, he gave Julia brothers by a vile mother, letting the defeated rally in the depths of Libya, frittering his time in that torrid intrigue in Egypt, yielding the land to her rather than ruling himself. Confident of her charms, Cleopatra came to him in sorrow but not in tears, decked in the trappings of mourning, her hair unkempt to the right extent as if she had torn at it, and addressed him thus: 'O mighty Caesar, if ancestry is important to you, I am a noble daughter of the Ptolemies, pharaohs of Egypt, but driven from my father's throne, and an exile forever unless your right hand restores me to my former place; thus I a queen bow before you. Like a benign star, assist our nation. I would not be the first woman to reign over the Nile: Egypt will allow my rule, without distinction of gender. Read my father's last testament, which granted me equal share of power, gave me in marriage to my brother. If only he were free, the boy would love his sister, but his army and affections are ruled by Pothinus.

I myself do not seek a share of my father's power,  
only free our house from guilt and shame; destroy  
Pothinus' fatal influence, and bid the king reign.  
How swollen are that underling's ambitions! Now,  
having decapitated Magnus, he threatens you; may  
fate avert the danger! Was it not indignity enough,  
Caesar, for you and the world to suffer, that he is  
credited, this Pothinus, with murdering a Pompey?'

### **Book X:104-135 Cleopatra's splendour**

She would have sought to sway Caesar's hard heart  
in vain, if her beauty had not added to her prayers,  
and lust pleaded for her. She passed a sinful night  
with her corrupted arbiter. Caesar's favour won,  
purchased by her great gifts, the happy event was  
celebrated with a feast, and Cleopatra displayed,  
with tumultuous preparations, a magnificence  
that Rome has not yet equalled even now. Her  
palace itself was like a temple, such as a lesser  
age would scarce achieve, the very ceiling panels  
proclaiming riches, the rafters coated with gold.  
The walls gleamed with marble, no mere façade,  
agate stood there proudly, porphyry, alabaster  
underfoot to tread on throughout the whole hall,  
while ebony from Meroe, no mere cladding, took  
the place of the usual wood in forming the great  
doors, supporting the place not simply decoration.  
Ivory covered the atrium; the doors were inlaid  
with Indian tortoiseshell, coloured by hand, its  
plates adorned with many an emerald. Jewels  
gleamed from the couches, their furnishings  
flickering with tawny jasper, the covers deep  
dyed with Tyrian purple, dipped more than  
once in the cauldron, some embroidered in  
shining gold, others ablaze with scarlet, in  
the Egyptian manner of weaving on the loom.

There were also a swarm of attendants, a host of servants to the multitude, differing in age and cast of skin, some with the dark hair of Libya, some so tawny that Caesar declared he had never seen hair as red on the Rhine; some had black skin, woolly heads, the hair receding from the brow, and there were those wretched effeminate lads, who had lost their manhood to the knife: ranked opposite older youths whose cheeks showed barely any down.

### **Book X:136-193 The banquet**

There, kings, and Caesar, greater than they, were seated. There too was Cleopatra, not content with a crown of her own, or her brother for a husband, her baleful beauty inordinately painted, covered with Red Sea pearls, a fortune in her hair and around her neck, weighed down with jewellery. Her snowy breasts gleamed through the Sidonian stuff, threads wound tight on the Seres' shuttles, that Egyptian needle-workers loosen and extend drawing out the silk. On snowy tusks they set round citrus-wood tables cut in Moorish forests, such as Caesar never saw even on capturing Juba. What a mad blind rage for display, revealing her wealth to a general fresh from civil war, stirring the mind of an armed guest! Even if it were not Caesar, ready in impious warfare to gather riches from the ruins of a world, set here the ancient generals famous in less wealthy times, Fabricius or stern Curius, or let Cincinnatus recline there, snatched, soiled with sweat, from his Etrurian plough: and each would pray to celebrate such a splendid triumph in Rome. A banquet was served on gold of all that earth, air, sea or Nile affords, all that luxury, unprompted by hunger,

but wild with idle love of display, has sought throughout the world. Many birds and beasts divine in Egypt were served, and crystal ewers yielded Nile water for their hands; the wine, poured from great jewelled goblets, was not from Egyptian grapes, but noble Falernian, that Meroe brings to maturity in a few years, forcing fermentation on their stubborn nature. They donned garlands of flowering spikenard, and never-fading roses, drenched their hair in cinnamon that had not yet been exposed to the outer air, or lost its natural scent; and in cardamom culled nearby, and recently despatched. Caesar learns how to squander the riches of a ransacked world, ashamed to have fought so impoverished a son-in-law, now seeking a reason to make war on Egypt. When enjoyment, sated, put an end to eating and drinking, Caesar began a long discourse to prolong the evening, engaging Acoreus, who dressed in linen robes reclined on a high couch, in friendly speech: 'Devoted as you are, sir, to holy things, and as your age shows not unfavoured by the gods, tell me of the origins of the Egyptian people, the country's features, the nation's manners, your rites, and the forms of your gods. Reveal what is engraved on your ancient shrines, and disclose whatever of your gods they themselves will make known. Since your ancestors taught Plato of Athens their religion, was there ever a guest of yours more fitted to hear of it, with more capacious mind? It is true that report of Pompey brought me to your country, but its fame also: in the midst of war I have always found the time to study the stars above, celestial regions; my calendar does not yield to that of Eudoxus. And while

such force of mind and love of truth flourishes  
within me, there is nothing I would rather know  
than the cause, hidden through so many ages,  
of the Nile's floods, and its unknown source.  
Grant me firm expectation of seeing the fount  
of that river, and I will abandon civil warfare.'  
He paused, and Acoreus the priest replied thus:

### **Book X:194-267 The cause of the Nile flood**

'Caesar, it is permitted me to reveal the secrets  
of our mighty ancestors, unknown to this day  
to the profane. Let others think it pious to hide  
such wondrous knowledge, but I believe it is  
the gods' will that these things be understood,  
and mankind learn their sacred laws. Diverse  
powers were assigned to the stars that control  
the fleeting heavens, and rule the sky. The Sun  
marks time and changes night to day; his force  
prevents planets progressing, and delays their  
wandering courses while they seem stationary.  
The changes of the Moon create the tidal surge.  
The freezing ice of snowy zones was assigned  
to Saturn; to Mars, winds and sudden lightning;  
under Jove the temperate climate and clear air;  
while fecund Venus owns the seeds of everything,  
as Mercury controls the element of water. When  
Mercury has occupied that region of the heavens  
where Leo borders on Cancer, when Sirius emits  
fierce fire, on the ecliptic that tracks the changing  
seasons, that intersects the tropic of Capricorn;  
and that of Cancer beneath which lie the sources  
of the Nile; when that lord of the watery element  
shines vertically on them, the river's sources flow,  
and as the waxing moon raises the oceans so Nile  
obeys the command, and does not falter in its flow  
till night regains the hours it lost to day in summer.

The ancient belief was wrong that Ethiopian snows swell the Nile and flood the fields. No north-winds reach those mountains, as evidenced by the colour of the Ethiopians, blackened by sun and scorching southerlies. Moreover, every river source that flows when the ice melts rises in early spring when snows thaw, but the Nile waters never rise till Sirius shines, nor fully recede till the autumn equinox, under Libra. Nile knows not the laws that govern other rivers, it rises not in winter when the sunlight is faint, when its flood lacks purpose, but commanded to temper an adverse climate it rises in torrid midsummer heat; and, that fire might not waste the earth, Nile comes to aid the people; rising in the jaws of Leo, invoked by Syene's prayers, where it scorches under Cancer; and not receding from the plains till the autumn sun declines and casts noon shadow at Meroe. Who can explain the reason? Our mother Nature commanded the Nile to rise thus, and mankind needs it to do so. The ancients also erred in ascribing its rise to westerly winds that blow each day for many days at a certain season; that either drive clouds from west to south, and force the rain to fill the Nile, or else encounter the river's flow at its several mouths, and slow it by the pressure of the waves, till it overflows the fields since its course is hindered, and the sea obstructs it. Some think that there are air-passages underground, vast spaces within its hollowed mass: and that, there, water travels to and fro invisibly, and is drawn from the frozen north to the equator when the sun at Meroe shines overhead and the parched earth attracts the flow; Ganges and the Po being drawn through hidden realms of the earth, till Nile, discharging those streams from a single source, channels them through its many mouths to the sea. They even say the Nile's violent eruption is an outflow from the distant Ocean that bounds all lands, its saltwater freshening with the great distance travelled.

While some believe the sun and sky are fed by Ocean;  
the sun in the grip of fiery Cancer, sucks up the waters,  
and more than the air can absorb, which night returns  
in downpours on the Nile. But if I might give my own  
opinion, Caesar, in so great a matter, I say, ages after  
the world was created, certain waters burst from veins  
of the earth after earthquakes, not at the command of  
a deity; but others, like the Nile, had their beginning  
at its very foundation, with all other things, and these  
latter the maker and creator bound by their own laws.

### **Book X:268-331 The source of the Nile**

This desire you have to know the Nile's source,  
Roman, was shared by Pharaohs and the kings  
of Macedonia and Persia; no age but wished to  
hand this knowledge to futurity; yet Nature's  
powers of concealment have held sway till now.  
Alexander, greatest of men, begrudged Memphis  
its worship of the Nile, and sent picked men into  
the furthest reaches of Ethiopia; but they were  
thwarted by the burning zone of parching skies;  
and only saw the Nile steam with heat. Sesostris  
reached the western limits of the world, drove  
his chariot with kings under the yoke, drank of  
the Rhone and Po, yet never the sources of Nile.  
Cambyses, that madman, penetrated the eastern  
lands of the long-lived Macrobian; ran short of  
food and ate his own dead, but returned with no  
more knowledge of you, Nile. Even mendacious  
legend has not ventured to speak of your source.  
Whoever looks on it is intrigued, and no nation  
can boast the glory of possessing Nile as its own.  
I will reveal your course, Nile, as far as the deity  
who conceals it grants me knowledge of the flow.  
You rise on the equator, boldly lifting your shores  
to burning Cancer, you flow due north towards

the heart of Bootes (yet your channel winds and bends west and east, now adding ground towards Arabia, now towards the sands of Libya), Seres the first to see you, yet also query your source, you who reach Ethiopian plains an alien river, no land knowing to whom it owes your flow. Nature has revealed to none your hidden source, preventing any seeing the infant Nile, concealing the valley where you rise, preferring the nations to wonder than to know. It is given you to swell at the midsummer solstice, rising in alien winter, bringing the winter with you, and alone allowed to wander the southern and northern hemispheres. In the former your hidden source, your final goal in the latter. Your wide waters part to surround Meroe, and the fertile soil her black-skinned races cultivate, dense with the foliage of ebony-trees; yet though Meroe is thick with leaves, she lacks shade to temper the summer heat, since she lies directly beneath the sun in Leo. Then you pass through the torrid zone with no loss of volume, and cross a length of barren sand, at one time all your flow gathered in a single channel, at another straying, overflowing the banks that readily yield. Then your many streams are gathered once more into a sluggish channel where Philae, the gateway to Egypt, divides that realm from the Arab nations. Later cleaving the desert where trade links the Red Sea to our own, your flow is gentle. Who would think the river that glides so smoothly there, had roused its whole turbulent fury, here? Yet where your stream runs in a rough channel, with violent cataracts, resentful that rock should obstruct your flow that ran free, you trouble the stars with your spray, drowned by your roar, as the cliffs resound and your waters whiten with foam in the confined gorge. Then comes the sacred island our hallowed



traditions call Abatos; that place is struck and feels the tumult first, there are the rocks where they say the river rises, since there are the first signs of its flood. From this point on, nature has flanked your wandering flow with mountains that deny you to Libya, Nile, and between which your current flows tamed, and silent in a deep valley. Memphis is first to offer widening plains for you to overflow, and forbids your channel to set borders to your flood.'

### **Book X:332-433 Pothinus conspires against Caesar**

So they passed the time till after midnight, apparently in peace and security, but Pothinus' troubled mind, now stained with a sacrilegious murder, was never free of evil thoughts: and after killing Pompey he no longer judged anything a crime; shades of the dead possessed his breast, and the avenging Furies spurred him on to fresh horrors. Once more his vile hands prepared to shed blood, blood that the fates intended to spurt for oppressed senators; a Senate's vengeance, their punishment for bringing civil war, was almost yielded to the base-born. Destiny, avert the wrong, let Caesar's head not fall without our Brutus there, or the punishment of a Roman tyrant would only go to further Egypt's guilt, and its warning be lost! Pothinus works an audacious plot doomed to fail: not seeking to commit murder with secret cunning, instead attacking the undefeated leader in open war. His crimes emboldened him to order that Caesar's head be severed as his son-in-law Pompey's was, and he told a loyal henchmen to carry the message to Achillas, his accomplice in Pompey's murder; Achillas, whom the unwarlike boy, his Pharaoh, had appointed to command all his forces and to whom, reserving no authority for himself, he had handed the sword to use against all, even the king

himself. 'Is this a moment,' Pothinus demanded, 'to lie in your soft bed, sleeping long and soundly, now Cleopatra has seized the palace, and Egypt, betrayed by her, is granted to her as well? Shall you alone fail to hasten to your mistress' bed? The impious sister weds her brother, now she is wed already to the Roman, scurrying between two spouses, possessing Egypt and servicing Rome. Cleopatra conquered the older man's heart with drugs; trust the boy, at your peril, who, if a single night brings them together, and he yields to her embraces with incestuous passion, plunged in illicit love masquerading as natural affection, will grant her your head and mine, perhaps for a single kiss. If the sister proves charming, we'll pay with crucifixion or at the stake. No refuge anywhere remains: the royal spouse on one side, adulterous Caesar on the other. We, to confess the truth, are guilty if that cruel one is judge; and which of us with whom she's chaste does Cleopatra not consider harmful? By the crime we both committed, and lost by; by our pact sealed with Pompey's blood; act; stir up conflict with some sudden disturbance; attack now, and break off their nocturnal union, slay our cruel mistress in her bed, be her partner who he may. Nor be deterred from an attempt by Fortune, who has raised this Roman general and set him over all the world: we share his ambition, and Pompey's death exalts us also. Gaze at that shore whose crime fuels our hopes; ask of the blood-stained tide what power is ours, and look on Pompey's grave, a little heap of dust, that covers something less than a corpse. The man you fear is no more than Pompey. What matter if our blood is not noble, if we cannot command kingdoms or the power of nations: through fate we are great in crime. Fortune placed these men

in our grasp: behold another nobler victim comes!  
Let us placate the Italians with a second killing:  
cutting Caesar's throat would bring us this, that  
the people of Rome will love those who as yet  
are only viewed as Pompey's murderers. Why  
dread Caesar's great fame and his army, who  
on his leaving it behind is a mere soldier? This  
night shall end the civil war, yield an offering  
to the dead for mankind, sending to the shades  
that life the world is still owed. Go, bravely  
against Caesar; let the Egyptian soldiers serve  
their king, and the Romans their own. Beware  
delay! You will find him sated from the feast,  
drunk with wine, ripe for dalliance; be daring;  
heaven will grant you what Cato and Brutus  
so often pray for.' Achilles was not slow to  
obey the call to action, and gave the order to  
advance but without the usual noise, no blare  
of trumpets betraying the call to arms, swiftly  
readying all the cruel appurtenances of war.  
Most of his troops were Roman soldiers, but so  
corrupted militarily by alien ways, and now so  
oblivious to Rome, that though it was shameful  
to serve an Egyptian king, they marched with his  
slave as general, at the bidding of his henchman.  
Camp-followers have no loyalty or sense of duty,  
their swords are for sale: where lie easy pickings  
there is their cause. They will threaten a Caesar's  
life, not on their own behalf but for a little pay.  
Oh, divine law! Where did the wretched destiny  
of empire fail to bring civil war? Absent from  
Pharsalia, the men were nevertheless maddened,  
like their nation, beside the Nile. The Ptolemies  
would have shown less daring if they had made  
Pompey welcome! The truth is every right hand  
belongs to the powers above, and no Roman is  
allowed to stand idle. It has so pleased the gods

to divide Rome's being: and though the nations were no longer at odds regarding Caesar or his son-in-law, now a mere underling had stirred civil conflict, with Achillas usurping the part of a Roman; and unless the fates deflected their attack on Caesar's life, their plan would triumph. Both were ready while, distracted by the banquet, the court was open to every treachery, such that Caesar's blood might fill the Pharaoh's drinking cup, and his head encumber the table. But they feared the danger and confusion of night action; left to chance, you, Ptolemy, might be slain in a murderous confusion. Such was their trust in their swords, that they put off the moment; and contemptuous of the ease of execution of their grand design, thinking it a loss easily repaired, these slaves let slip the chance of killing Caesar. He was saved to meet his punishment in daylight; and granted one more night by Pothinus, Caesar gained a respite from death, till the sun's rising.

### **Book X:434-485 The conspirators attack**

The morning-star was shining over Mount Casius, bringing the dawn to Egypt, warm even at sunrise, when an armed force was seen at some distance from the walls, not a confused mass of stragglers, but well-ordered ranks advancing towards them: ready to charge, endure and inflict close combat. Caesar, distrusting the city's defences, protected himself by closing the palace gates, submitting to a base hiding-place. Shut in as he was, the wider palace was no longer his: his forces penned in one corner. His pride was assailed by rage and fear, fear of attack and anger at his fear. So some wild and noble creature trapped in a narrow cage roars and furiously bites the bars, till his teeth shatter;

so your fires, Vulcan, would rage in the Sicilian depths if Etna's summit crater were once sealed. Not long previously, below Mount Haemus' cliffs, Caesar had defied Rome's leaders, armed senators under Pompey's command; his cause undeserving of success, yet promising himself an unjust victory. Now though, fearing the baseness of slaves, he hid behind the walls while the missiles rained down. He whom neither Alanians, nor Scythians, nor even the Moors who make strangers a target, could harm; he for whom the whole Roman world was too small, who would have thought India to Phoenician Cadiz, too slight a realm; like a harmless child or a woman when a city's captured, now sought safety indoors, relying on barricaded entrance-ways to save his life, wandering, anxious, uncertain, from room to room, and not without the king, whom he took everywhere with him, intending, if he himself must die, to exact punishment on Ptolemy, make an example of him, and if javelins, firebrands were lacking hurl that head at its slaves. So, they say, Medea, the Colchian witch, fearing vengeance for her treason and flight, awaited her father with a sword in one hand, the head of her brother in the other. But Caesar, in desperate straits, was forced to explore a truce, and a royal courtier was sent, bearing a message from their absent king, rebuking the rebellious slaves, questioning their authority for action. But the usual convention, those sacred rules respected by all nations, failed to save that seeker of peace, sent by the king. Where should this rank among your crimes, Egypt, the land guilty of so many atrocities? Not Thessaly nor Juba's barren lands, nor Pontus plagued by Pharnaces' war against his father, nor Spain through which the cold Ebro flows, nor the savage Syrtes, none takes such delight in them as you. Attacked on every side, now missiles cascade on the palace, and batter at the walls. Lacking a ram

to shatter the gates, and break the defences at a blow; lacking engines of war, mistrustful of fire to achieve their aim, dividing blindly, the attackers surrounded the vast reach of walls, unable to use their full force. Fate denied them, Fortune acted as a defensive wall.

### **Book X:486-546 Caesar prepares to escape by sea**

The palace was even attacked from the sea, at a point where that glorious structure projected boldly above the waters. But Caesar was everywhere in defence, driving back some with the sword, others with fire; such his strength of mind, he acted like the besieger. He ordered brands steeped in resin hurled at the sails of the crowded ships, and the fire ran swiftly along the rigging, over the decks whose caulking melted, till the thwarts and the towering yards blazed as one. Soon the half-burned vessels sank beneath the waves, the attackers being swamped, with their weapons. Nor did flames fall only on the ships: houses nearby caught fire with the fierce heat, and wind increased the conflagration, till the flames, driven by the gale, rushed whirling over the roofs, swiftly as meteors trace furrows in the sky, though lacking material to feed on, and burning by means of the air alone. This danger recalled the attackers from the barred palace to save their city. Wasting no time, Caesar seized the respite granted by fire, and boarded ship in the dark of night. His success in war was ever based on speed, and now he swiftly seized Pharos, the gateway to the sea. Once, in the days of Proteus the seer, it was an island in the waters, but now it was linked to the walls of Alexandria. It was doubly useful to Caesar in this conflict: he prevented the enemy sailing through the narrow entrance to reach the sea, and ensured the harbour was opened to reinforcements. Then he no longer

delayed the punishment of death that Pothinus had earned, though not inflicted by the means deserved; crucifixion, burning, wild beasts jaws; but dying Pompey's death. Meanwhile, Cleopatra's younger sister, Arsinoe, was conveyed secretly by a ruse of Ganymede, her servant, to Caesar's enemies, where, as a daughter of the Ptolemies, she took command of them in the king's name, and rightly had Achillas slain, Ptolemy's dire instrument, by the sword. So a second victim was offered to your shade, Magnus, yet the fates were still not satisfied. Far be it that vengeance should end there. Not Ptolemy nor all his house sufficed: for until his own countrymen's blades pierced Caesar's body, Pompey would remain unavenged. There, the madness did not end with Pothinus' death; and led by Ganymede the host rushed to arms and made successful skirmishes. With Caesar in extreme danger, that day might have been forever notable. His soldiers crowded round him on the narrow mole, as he prepared to embark his force on the empty ships, when he was suddenly surrounded by all the terrors of war: on one side close-packed vessels lined the shore, on the other infantry attacked his rear. Neither valour nor flight offered a path of safety, he could barely hope for an honourable death. No rout of the enemy ranks, no piles of dead, no act of bloodshed was needed to conquer Caesar then; perplexed, trapped by the very nature of his position, torn between fearing death and praying for death, he thought again of Scaeva in the serried ranks, Scaeva who won eternal glory on your field, Dyrrachium; that Scaeva who, when the walls there were breached and Pompey trampled the ramparts underfoot, alone withstood the forces against him.

## **End of Lucan's Unfinished Book X**