DE RERUM NATURA

Lucretius

Translated by Christopher Kelk

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BOOK I

O mother of Aeneas' children, who
Delight both men and gods, dear Venus, you
Who fill with fruitfulness the busy sea
And teeming lands beneath the canopy
Of gliding stars, all creatures are created
Through you, through you we are illuminated
By the sun: the winds and clouds all flee away
At your approach, for you a rich display
Throughout the beautiful and chequered earth
Of flowers is seen, the seas betray their mirth,
For you the radiant land spreads out its light.
As soon as springtime's face has come in sight
And procreant gales storm from the West, set free,
Birds forecast your approach ecstatically.
Across the fecund fields the wild herds dance
And swim the rapid streams. With radiance
Possessed, they follow you with fervency
Wherever you lead them. Across each sea,
Each rapid river and each mountain spur,
Birds' feathery homes and verdant plains, you stir
Them all with love that they might propagate
Their kind forever. Since you regulate
Alone the Cosmos and the shores of light
Are empty, and there's nothing fair or bright
Without you, I am keen that for the verse
About the Cosmos which I now rehearse

And to my dear friend Memmius address
(A friend whom you have always wished, goddess,
To be supreme) you'll be accessory.
So give my words lifelong urbanity.
Across the world bring peace to fierce warfare,
For you alone have mastery to share
Your peace with us, since Mars, who governs all
Affairs of savage war, will often fall
Into your lap, by constant love subdued,
And, gazing on your eyes, enjoys the food
It gives, his eyes and throat both backward cast,
And breathes upon your lips. Then hold him fast,
O holy one, sweet nothings uttering
To garner peace for Rome as there you cling,
Because in troubled times I cannot pen
My verse , nor can that most noble of men,
Famed Memmius, neglect the Roman cause.
As for the rest, this too should give us pause –
With ready ears and singleness of mind,
Withdrawn from every care, prepare to find
True judgment, lest these gifts that I've laid out
For you with ardent zealousness you flout
Before you understand them. I'll debate
The heavenly statutes and expatiate
On Nature's primal germs which were created
By Her and fortified and propagated.
I have devised to call them by the name
Of matter, atoms, seeds, for all things came

From them. When humankind by everyone
Was seen to be lamentably undone
By harsh religion, which up in the sky
Showed its fierce face to every mortal eye,
A Grecian first ventured to elevate
Men's eyes so that they might then tolerate
That scourge: no godly fates nor lightning's flash
Nor threatening thunder ever could abash
That man – they rather chafed his dauntless heart
To be the very first to tear apart
The gates of nature: thus his iron will
And brain prevailed; afar he wandered stlll
Beyond the flaming walls encompassing
The world, through the huge All meandering,
At last arriving hither to relate
To us the things that Nature can create
And those it can't, what law's prescribed for each,
The boundary-stone that into Time can reach
So far: he thus established mastery
Over religion, and his victory
Exalts in heaven. But maybe I fear
Unholy realms of thought are active here
And you are travelling on a sinful course
Because that same religion is a source
Of evil: witness Agamemnon's daughter,
The victim, at Diana's shrine, of slaughter,
The shrine the Grecian counsellors debased;
The chaplet, that had been placed on her chaste

Tresses, and fillets fluttering down the side
Of either cheek she felt, and then she spied
Her grieving father and the priests who kept
The knife concealed, as all the people wept
At sight of her. Struck dumb with terror, she
Dropped down upon the ground with sinking knee
(A king's first-born, and yet it served her nought).
They raised her up and to the altar brought
The trembling girl, but not that she should be
A bride with singing and solemnity –
A sinless girl sinfully decimated,
By him who sired her assassinated,
A bloody sacrifice that winds might blow
Auspiciously and let his navy go
To Troy. Such crimes religion leads us to.
And then the time will come when even you,
Forced by bards' terror-tales, would split away
From us. Even now how many dreams can they
Concoct to thwart your visions and distress
All of your fortunes with base fearfulness!
With reason! For if men could only see
A certain ending to their misery,
They would be able, by some reasoning,
To find a way to crush the menacing
Of prophets and religions. For now, though,
No reason or procedure do they know,
Afraid that they'll bear endless penalties
In death. They do not know the qualities

Of souls, whether they're born or come maybe
Inside us at our own nativity
And die with us or visit Orcus' land
And his great caves or, by some god's command,
Brute herds, as has been sung by Ennius,
Who brought from lovely Helicon to us
A wreath of bright perennial greenery,
Renowned forever throughout Italy;
Yet he, whose verse shall last forevermore,
Tells us that those Acheronian vaults don't store
Our souls or bodies, merely strangely grey
Simulacra; Ennius goes on to say
Immortal Homer's ghost, tears tumbling
Out of his eyes, explained to him the spring
Whence Nature comes and said we must reflect
Upon the heavens and learn the laws' effect
Upon the sun and moon and scrutinize
What force controls our life beneath the skies,
But in particular, with reasoning,
To scan the mind and soul and whence they spring
And what dread things approach our waking eyes
When we're unhealthy and what terrifies
Us while we're sleeping until we seem faced
With those who many years have been embraced
By earth's strong arms, and hear them, too, close by.
I'm quite aware how hard it is to try
To chronicle in Latin poetry
The Greeks' cryptic disclosures, specially

Because there are new words we must dig out
For many things since we are still without
So many terms, the subject being new.
And yet the sweet friendship I find in you,
Your worth, the hoped-for joy, induces me
To bear, night after night, this drudgery,
To find the words, the music that I might
At last disclose to you the glorious light
Wherewith you can behold its very heart.
No flaming spoke of light, no glittering dart
Of dawn can rout the mind's obscurity,
This scourge, yet Nature's aspect and decree
Instructs us that there's nothing that's been bred
From nothing. Every mortal's ruled by dread
Because he sees above and on the land
Many things whose causes he can't understand
But thinks the gods control. But once we know
That nothing's bred of nothing, that will show
More clearly what we seek – those things alone
That caused all things to fill the global zone
Without the aid of gods. If everything
Came out of nothing, every kind would spring
From everything, yet lacking any seed.
Men from the sea and from the land a breed
Of scaly things and from the heavens birds
May rise, and hornèd beasts and other herds,
All kinds would roam both tilth and wilderness
With their offspring. The trees would not possess

The same fruits, which would change, and any tree
Would carry any fruit quite randomly.
Where would the procreant atoms be? Indeed
How could a constant mother yield their seed?
But since all have fixed seeds, they all are sent
To the shores of light, born from each element
And primal body of its own. Therefore
All cannot come from all, because a store
Of secret strength exists in each. Likewise,
Why does the rose in springtime meet our eyes,
Corn in the summer, vines at autumn's lure
If not because established seeds are sure
To merge in their own season and we see
Creations newly born accordingly
When times are due and when the vigorous earth
With safety brings her tender young to birth
Upon the shores of light? If all things, though,
Came from a void, they suddenly would grow
In alien months and unexpectedly
With no primordial germs and thus would be
From procreation kept in an adverse hour.
There'd be no space for living seeds to flower;
From being tiny babies suddenly
Youths would appear and from the earth a tree
Would spring (impossible!): all things indeed
Grow gradually, commensurate with each seed,
Retaining their own kind; thus we may know
That from their own material all things grow.

Without each season's showers of rain the earth
Cannot to tasty nourishment give birth
And whatsoever lives, if it is barred
From food, cannot prolong its kind and guard
Its life; more easily we may bear in mind
That there are many bodies of like kind
In many things (as letters commonly
Occurring in a lot of words we see)
Than anything can have no fountain-head.
And why are there no bulky men who tread
The seas on foot by Nature's will or rend
Great mountains with their hands or reach no end
Of their life-span unless the reasoning
Is 'Nothing comes from nothing', since each thing
Needs seeds wherefrom to grow, we must declare,
And reach out to the gentle fields of air.
Since tilled lands top the untilled lands and yield
A more abundant harvest in the field,
There must be pristine things beneath the soil
That we must with our ploughshares and our toil
Raise up; if there were none, then we would see
That they would flourish more spontaneously
Without our work, while Nature liquefies
Each body in itself, and nothing dies.
If anything were mortal, it would die
And perish in the blinking of an eye.
There'd be no need of force to bring about
Its dissolution and thus snuff it out.

Since all have ageless seeds, we may not know
The death of anything till, with one blow,
That force cleaves it in two or penetrates
Its inward spaces and annihilates
It all. Moreover, if Time takes away
All things as it consumes them, in what way
May Venus resurrect them, breed by breed?
How may the chequered earth foster and feed
Them then? How can the ocean be supplied
By native springs and rivers far and wide?
Whence can the ether feed the stars in the sky?
For endless time and all the days gone by
Would have killed all mortals things. Considering,
However, if this sum of everything
Has been renewed forever, certainly
They're all immortal. Thus eternally
Nothing returns to nothing. That some might
Could end all things if they were not held tight
By timeless matter more or less; a touch
Could have set off destruction: nothing much
More than the slightest force would liquefy
The weft of things where there is no supply
Of timeless stock, but now, because between
Each other all primordial parts have been
Made different and all will yet abide
Unhurt unless some force should get inside
And crush the warp and woof of each. Nothing
Returns to nothing, but, when crumbling,

They revert to primal forms. When Jupiter hurls
Rainstorms upon the earth, they die, but pearls
Of shining grain arise and boughs are green
And growing trees, laden with fruit, are seen,
Whence men and beasts are fed, while cities thrive
In joy with boys and girls, the woods alive
With fledglings everywhere; along the leas
The fat and weary cattle take their ease,
White ooze from their full udders trickling,
From which the new-born calves go scampering
On awkward legs along the meadowland,
With new milk freshened; what we understand,
Therefore, as mortal isn't so – each thing
Nature takes from another, suffering
Nothing else to be produced unless it's due
To something else's death. Since I taught you
That nought's derived from nought nor, equally,
Can be recalled, do not discredit me,
Since we cannot see primal forms and so
The bodies that we speak of you must know
Cannot be seen. The winds, like lashing whips,
Attack one's face, deluging massive ships,
Rending the clouds above us, and bestrew
The fields with trees in a frantic hullabaloo
And blast the mountain-tops with gusts that pound
The forests, rushing with a fearful sound
And threatening and stirring up the sea.
Winds, then, are hidden forms undoubtedly,

Whirling the sea, the land, the clouds as well
And sweeping them along as on they swell
In aimless ruin, as a river's mild
And supple bulk may suddenly turn wild
With downpours from the mountains, fracturing
Branches and even trees and toppling
The sturdy bridges, which can't tolerate
Its sudden force, and at a fearful rate
Beats round the piers and in a trice destroys
Massive stone buildings with a dreadful noise.
Therefore all other blasts of wind as well
Must act the same, as, like a mighty swell
Of floods, spread out and, strengthening their force,
Drive everything before them in their course
And sometimes seize their victims and then hurl
Them onward in a meteoric whirl.
Winds are just unseen bodies which we see
Match mighty rivers in their rivalry,
Though these are visible. We are aware
Of smells, but when we breathe them in the air
We never see them: heat we never see,
Nor cold, nor voices, and yet they must be
Corporeal, deep down, essentially
Since they attack our responsivity;
The power of touch the body has, alone.
Indeed a piece of clothing that has grown
Moist when it's hanging on a surf-beat shore
Will, once it that it has been spread out before

The sun, be dried. But no-one's ever seen
How moisture seeps in nor how heat has been
Dispersed. Therefore in tiny quantities
It happens, and the process no-one sees.
A ring upon the finger in that way
Throughout ensuing years will wear away;
The eaves' damp scoops the stone; insidiously
The ploughshare's iron hook wastes in the lea;
The rock-paved highways, used by many feet,
Get worn; as passersby will touch and greet
Bronze statues, so these statues' right hands grow
Leaner. While the effect of this we know,
Nature precludes the vision from our eyes
Of just which particles will vaporize.
Lastly, what time and nature gradually
Allow, compelling growth proportionately,
We may not see. Nor may we ever know,
When things with foul deterioration grow
Senile or when the bustling crags up high
Above the ocean are eroded by
The salt, what's lost in time. And yet creation
Is not ingested with an installation
Of body – there's a void in things. To know
This fact will serve you anywhere you go,
Erasing doubts and keeping you from prying
Into all things and thinking that I'm lying.
Therefore there is an untouched emptiness:
Were this not so, nothing could then progress;

A body's property is to impede
While ever-present – nothing could impede
Without it, since nothing could yield a place
To start. But now across the open space
And heaven, seas and lands all things we see
Are moving in a great diversity
Of ways with many causes: if they were
Deprived of void, they'd have no means to stir
About or even to be born at all,
Since matter everywhere would simply stall.
Moreover, since all things are thought to be
Concrete, we nevertheless are bound to see
They're actually mixed with void. The moisture seeps
In rocks and caves: in beady drops it weeps.
Food finds a way through every living thing,
And trees increase and in due season bring
Their crop to life and from the deepest roots
Through all the trunks and boughs pour out their fruits.
Through walls and doors roam voices in their flight
And through our bones the jaws of iciness bite.
Without a void through which a body may
Travel, we could not see in any way
This taking place. Again, why do we see
Things heavier than others though they be
No larger? Should a ball of wool possess
Within itself the selfsame bulkiness
As does a lump of lead, then they would be
The same weight. For a body's property

Is pushing everything down, though emptiness,
In contrast, manifests its weightlessness.
What's large but lighter shows infallibly
That it possesses more vacuity;
The heavier shows more bulk and has less space
Inside. That which we wisely try to trace
Exists, mixed in with things, and this we call
The void. Right here I feel I must forestall
What some folk think, for this is what they say:
That scaly creatures, as they swim, give way
To waters, and fish leave behind them space
To which the yielding billows swiftly race;
And other things can yet be moved and move,
Though everything is packed. This I disprove,
For it is wholly false. For how, indeed,
Can creatures move unless the waters cede
Their place? How can the fish advance unless
The waters yield if fish are powerless
To move? Then either bodies are divested
Of motion or all things have been invested
With void mixed in, whereby each gets its start
To move. When two broad bodies spring apart
After colliding, then the air must press
Into the void between them. Nonetheless,
Though streaming round those bodies rapidly,
The air can't fill the gap immediately,
For first it must fill one place and then go
Through all the other ones. If someone, though,

Thinks that this comes about because the air,
When bodies spring apart, condenses, they're
Quite wrong, for then a void has been created
Where there had not been one, another sated
Which had been void, while air in such a way
Can't be condensed. But if it could, I say
Without a void the air could not compress
Itself into one part. Though nonetheless
You dally and refute, you must affirm
That void exists. I also can confirm
My words with many an argument that I
Can glean, but these footprints will satisfy
A rational mind. As dogs will sniff around
The forests of a mountain till they've found
A wild beast's lair covered in brush, since they
Have scented certain footsteps on their way,
Thus you yourself can hunt in themes like these
From thought to thought and seek out sanctuaries
And ferret out the truth. But if you're slow
And deviate from what you seek, although
But barely, I can promise, Memmius,
That from my singing tongue such copious
Draughts shall be poured that I'll feel dread that we
Shall be invaded by senility,
The gates of life within us loosed, before
These verses that I write can cast my store
Of proofs into your ears. Now I shall start
To weave my tale again: in Nature's heart

Are void and body which move variously.
Body exists – our own capacity
Of thinking says it's so. Unless we're firm
In our deep faith, we never could confirm
Our thoughts on hidden things. Without what we
Call void, there's nowhere that a body may be
Arranged or move about, as I just now
Have said, and you cannot say anyhow
That from a body there is anything
That's been disjointed, thus exhibiting
Nature's third part. What is an entity
Must be a something, and the same must be
Able, if tangible, to add to the sum
Of body, whether the change is minimum
Or large, while it exists; but if you may
Not touch it and it cannot block the way
Of objects passing through it, it must be
What we have called a void. Additionally,
What of itself exists it is a fact
Is forced to be performed upon or act
Or else hold moving things. Body alone
Acts or is acted on. Nothing is known
To render room but body, and therefore
Besides body and void there is no more –
No third thing Nature has. No entities
But those enter the thoughts of men or seize
Their senses. For whatever you care to name
Is linked to those two entities or came

From them. No property in any way,
Unless it brings about lethal decay,
Can be split from a thing, as we can see
Weight in a rock, water's fluidity,
Fire's hotness, every corporal body's touch
And void's intangibility. But such
As slavery, riches, insolvency,
Autonomy, warfare and harmony
And all things which, while Nature stays the same,
Arrive and then depart we rightly name
Accidents. Even time does not exist
Of its own self, but we may make a list
In our own minds of what in history
Occurred, the present and what's yet to be;
No man can feel time, it must be confessed,
Loosed as it is from motion and from rest.
When folk say Helen's rape and Troy's defeat
Is happening, take care not to repeat
That this is so, for that is history
And all events have been irrevocably
Snatched up by time. All deeds, we may declare,
Are accidents: and therefore if nowhere
Could space and room exist whereby things could
Take place, then Helen's beauty never would
Have glowed in Paris' breast and set alight
That savage war nor in the dead of night
Would Greeks have poured out from the horse of wood
And put Troy to the flames, and thus you should

Declare these things do not approximate
Body or void, but rather you should state
That they are accidents of body and
The place where things occur. Thus understand
That bodies are things' rudiments partially,
Though partially as well a unity
Of all of them. But nothing can repress
These rudiments, since by their solidness
They conquer, though it's difficult to see
That anything contains solidity.
For lightning from heaven passes through
The walls of houses – clamouring voices, too,
Iron's white-hot in the fire, rocks burst asunder
When burned with fierce steam, gold which suffers under
Great heat will totter, icy bronze will turn
To water under flames and silver burn
Yet pierce with cold, since we feel each sensation
In both hands when we wait for a libation.
We know, then, nothing has a solid shape.
However, since we never can escape
Nature or reasoning, let me extricate
In some few verses things that you yet wait
To hear – that there are some things that we know,
Firm and eternal, from which other things grow,
Creating all of nature. I have shown
That there's a dual nature that is known
To have two things, body and void, both far
Unlike each other, in which all things are

And act, each of itself and unalloyed,
As it must be. For where there is a void,
There is no body, while similarly
Where there's no body, void just cannot be.
Primordial bodies lack a void therefore
And have a solid form, and furthermore,
Since in created things a void is found,
There must be solid matter all around
The void; and nothing ever can reside,
If we can trust our rationale, inside
A void, unless you grant that what holds it
Is solid. Only matter that is knit
With other matter holds a void. Therefore
All solid matter lasts forevermore
While all else is dissolved. If what we call
A void did not exist, the world would all
Be solid. Everything would be a void
If certain bodies had not been employed
To fill the spaces. Both infallibly
Can be distinguished, though alternately,
Since Nature is not wholly full of space
Nor matter. There are bodies, in that case,
That vary both: they can't be liquefied
By outward blows or severed from inside
By penetration or be overthrown
In any way: these things to you I've shown
But recently. And thus, it seems, without
A void nothing is able to be snuffed out,

Feel dampness, cold, fire, by which everything
Is crushed. The more a void's inhabiting
A thing, the more it quakes from an attack.
So if, as I have taught, first bodies lack
A void, being solid, of necessity
They're timeless, for if in reality
They weren't, all things would have returned to nought
And all we see from nothing had been wrought.
But since but recently you have been taught
That nothing can be fashioned out of nought
And what's been born cannot be brought again
To nothing, it must stand to reason, then,
That primal germs have immortality
Within their form; bodies must finally
Dissolve so that the world can be renewed.
So they possess a plain simplicitude
Or they could not throughout eternity
Have saved the world. If a capacity
For always being broken had been given
BY Nature, all that matter would be riven
Already and at a specific time
Could not endure forever in its prime,
For things can be resolved more rapidly
Than made anew: what the infinity
Of time has ever crushed and liquefied
Cannot in later times be rectified,
But now a time's been fixed to bring an end
To this destruction and therefore to mend

Each thing, as we may see, that it may grow
According to its kind. I'll say also
That, though all forms are solid, nonetheless
They fashion things that have a flimsiness,
Air, water vapour, earth: we have recourse
To say how this occurs and with what force
They function, for all primal things possess
A void, but if they have a flimsiness
In them, we cannot use our powers of thought
To show how flint and iron can be brought
To life by them, for Nature wouldn't concede
That there could be within them even a seed
For making them. In their simplicity
These germs are strong and are imperviously
Condensed in combinations. Furthermore,
If there were an established limit for
Breaking the elements, from times long past
They still would have survived, able to last
Immune from danger. But since naturally
They're fragile, that through all infinity
Of time with countless blows they've been beset
Would seem far-fetched. Since limits have been set
For the growth and conservation of each kind
Within its lifetime, Nature has outlined
Their limitations, and since everything stays
The same so that each different bird displays
Its natural marks, then everything must be
Endowed with an immutability.

For if primordial germs in any way
Could change or be snuffed out, how could we say
What can or can't be born? What could be known
About its scope and each fixed boundary-stone?
Each generation could not frequently
Bring back each time each parent's property.
First bodies have a limit that we're banned
From seeing, and it has no sections and
Is minimal indeed and wasn't ever
A thing apart and in the future never
Shall be, since it's a part, essentially,
Of something else, and it is clear to see
That other segments lie in rows and fill
The nature of the primal germs, and still,
Because they are not self-existent, they
Must cleave to that from which they in no way
Can be divided. So these germs possess
A solid singleness and coalesce,
A close-packed mass of smallest things, combined
Not by a sum of segments but confined
In one strong singleness, for Nature needs
To keep them all that they might serve as seeds
And thus they may not wither or succumb.
Moreover, were there not a minimum,
Even the smallest bodies would possess
Infinite parts, thus making one half less –
Half of a half – and nothing would have been
Predestined. What's the difference between

The most and least? There is none, for although
The sum's incalculable, even so
Even the smallest things coequally
Have infinite parts. But rationality
Rejects this claim, asserting that we may
Not think it's true, and so you're forced to say
That there are things which have no parts indeed,
The minimums of Nature, and concede
That they are firm and timeless. Finally,
If Nature could compel all things to be
Resolved into the smallest entities,
She could not remake anything from these
Since things which have no parts do not possess
The power to generate – connectiveness,
Weights, blows, encounters, motions, anything
That leads to any action happening.
Of those who think the germ of things is fire,
And only fire, their reasoning is dire.
Their chief was Heraclitus in their battle,
A man who would to silly people prattle,
Famed as he was for mystifying speech,
For he would never undertake to reach
The grave, truth-seeking Greeks; for fools are fond
Of what's beneath distorted words beyond
All reason, thinking true what tunefully
Rings in their eardrums, worded pleasantly.
"How could things be so various if they
Are formed of fire, and fire alone?" I say.

Condensing fire would aid us not a whit
If the same nature synthesized in it
Were held by each of its parts. The heat would be
Keener with parts compressed, though, conversely,
Milder when severed or when strewn about;
And nothing more than this, there is no doubt,
Comes from such causes, nothing, too, much less
Could from a rare and compact fire egress.
If you admit a void's incorporated
In entities, fire can be concentrated
Or else left rarefied, but since they see
That other people think contrarily,
They hate to think an unmixed void's inside
Those things and therefore fear a bumpy ride
And lose the way of truth, failing to see
That, if one takes away the vacancy,
Thus everything must then be concentrated
And, out of all, one body is created,
Which cannot swiftly shoot out anything
The way a fire gives warmth, delivering
Its heat to everyone, that we may see
Its parts are not compact. Alternatively,
If they believe that, should the fire unite
With things in other different ways, it might
Be quenched and change its substance, then they must
Recant, for fire would then turn all to dust,
And out of nought the world would be created,
For when a thing has from its bounds mutated

It means swift death from what it was before.
It's necessary for a thing, therefore,
To last unharmed lest everything should go
Back into nought and then, reborn, should grow
Anew. Since there are things without a doubt
That keep their nature and, when things move out
Or in or change their natural symmetry,
They change their nature and each entity
Transforms: you then may see that they're not made
From fire. It would not help if some should fade,
Leave or be added new and others be
Transformed if they would keep their quality
Of heat, since whatsoever they produced
Would still be fire. This, then, I have adduced:
That there are entities whose combinations,
Movements, positions, shapes and organizations
Make fire and, since they have modified
Their form, they change the nature that's inside
Themselves, thereafter not resembling
Fire or anything able to bring
Particles to our senses, impacting
Upon our sense of touch. To say each thing
Is fire and nothing else exists, as he,
That Heraclitus, thinks, is idiocy.
He fights his senses while he overthrows
That which we all believe and thus he knows,
As he alleges, fire; certainly
The senses can perceive the fire, says he,

But nothing else, although all else is clear
As well. These sentiments of his appear
Inept and mad. Where can we make appeal
For proof? Well, when we're searching for what's real
And what is false, our faculties must be
The most reliable. And why should we
Remove all other things, acknowledging
Heat only rather than prohibiting
Fire and allowing everything else to be?
For either way it seems insanity.
So those who have decided all things' birth
Results from fire or air or water or earth
Have erred, it seems, from truth considerably.
Others believe that it's a harmony
Of earth and water, fire and air. As well,
Others believe that things can grow and swell
From fire, earth, breath and rain. Empedocles
Of Acragas was the earliest of these -
From that three-cornered isle of Sicily
Was he, round which flows the Ionian Sea,
Which with its grey-green billows twists and turns
As with its salty foam it shoots and churns.
Within its narrow straits the rapid sea
Divides the island's shores from Sicily.
Here stands the vast Charybdis, threatening
All sailors, here is Etna's rumbling,
Her fiery force collected to spew high
Her fury from her jaws up to the sky.

Though she's a wonder to all men, supplied
With such a glorious bounty, fortified
With famous heroes, she was never known
To breed a man whom she could call her own
More sanctified or marvellous or dear.
Songs from his godlike breast, so sweet to hear,
Extol hsi famed inventions, so that he
Barely appears part of humanity.
But he and those who are of lesser weight
In many ways, as I have said of late,
Though with prophetic zeal they formulated
Many good things, as if they emanated
From the shrine of their own hearts, more rationally
And holily than any prophecy
Out of the tripod and the Delphic bay
In Pythia, all the same have caused decay
In primal matters. Such a great decline
For great men! For to all things they assign
Motion, though driving out vacuity;
But rare and soft things they allow to be,
As air, sun, fire, lands, animals and grain,
But mixing in no void. They don't ordain
An end to splitting them or hesitate
To break them down, because they clearly state
There is no minimum, although we see
The boundary point of any entity
Must be the smallest thing. We must surmise,
Therefore, that things that never meet our eyes

Have boundary points as well and must possess
Minimums. Then these fellows all profess
That primal germs are soft, and thus we see
When they are being born, entirely
Mortal, they must return to nought and then
Develop out of nothing once again
And flourish; you know this is very far
From truth. In many ways all these things are,
Each to the other, sour and virulent
Since when they come together they are rent
Apart and die as we in tempests spy
Rains, winds and lightnings all asunder fly.
If everything from four things is created
And into these four things are liquidated,
How are those four things rated primary
Instead of being quite the contrary –
The prime material of everything?
They’re made from one another, altering
Their hue and nature immemorially.
Lightning and winds and torrents we can see,
But if you think these four things can convene
And still not change their natures, it is seen
That nothing’s born of them, insentient,
Like trees, or animate. They all present
Their nature, air mixed in with earth, and heat
With dew. But primal germs need to secrete
Some trait as they’re creating things in case
Some element should baffle and debase

Their spawn. They start with fires in the sky
And claim fire turns into the winds on high,
Thus making rain, then earth from rain, and then
All things are brought back from the earth again,
First dew, then air, then heat: they don't refrain
From interchanging, visiting terrain
From heaven, then back again, which in no way
The germs can do, for something has to stay
That's changeless lest to nothing everything
Is taken back, for change in anything
Means death to what it was before. Therefore,
Since those things that I mentioned heretofore
Are changed, they must derive from things that stay
Immutable forever in case they
Cause all to be returned entirely
To nought. Why not suppose that there can be
Things of such nature that, should they create
Fire, they'd have the power to generate
The breezes of the air by factoring
Some things into the mix and extracting
Others, both form and nature changed, and so
All things are interchanged? You may say, though,
'The facts are clear that all things have their birth,
Rising up to the breezes, from the earth.
If rainstorms were not sent propitiously,
Causing a quivering in every tree,
And heat provided by the rays of the sun,
No crop, no tree, no breathing thing – not one –

Would grow.' That's true – and if we weren't supplied
With food and moisture, we would soon have died;
For all of us with different things are fed,
Since many germs in different ways are bred
In many things and feed them naturally.
It often matters much how they may be
Conjoined with others and how they are bound
Together and what motions have been found
That they produce and get; for they comprise
The seas, the lands, the streams, the sun, the skies,
In different ways, though: in my verse you see
That all the words sound very differently
Depending on the text. By altering
The order alone, they can by just the ring
Of sound do much; but germs can yet apply
A wealth of combinations still, whereby
So many things may grow. Now let's explore
The *homoiomeria*, the Greek name for
The work of Anaxagoras which we
Can't name in Latin but can easily
Explain. First he affirms that every bone
From the most microscopic bones is grown,
As happens with all flesh, and blood must flow
From many drops of blood and gold must grow
From grains of gold, imagining the same
Occurs with earth, liquidity and flame,
Although dismissing void, allowing no
Limit to cutting matter up. And so,

On both of these accounts he seems to me
To err no less than those named recently.
The germs he feigns are too frail furthermore,
If they're primordial at their very core
And like the things themselves, and toil and die
Along with them, while nothing will deny
Them death. For what, when pressured, can survive
And, in the jaws of death, yet stay alive?
Fire? Moisture? Or the breezes in the skies?
Which one? Blood? Bones? Well, nothing, I surmise,
For all's as mortal as what we can see
Destroyed by this or that calamity.
For by the proofs above I may assert
That nothing can exist and then revert
To nought or grow from nought. And since we grow
Through nourishment, then you should surely know
That veins and blood and bones are all designed
By particles that are not the same kind
As them. But if they say all foods possess
Materialities which coalesce
And hold within themselves some tiny grains
Of nerves and bones and blood, as well as veins,
It follows that all foods, whether they be
Solid or moist, are a miscellany
Of foreign particles, a farrago
Of those corporeal parts. If bodies grow
From earth, the earth must be a mingling
Of foreign substances, which bloom and spring

From her. You'll find these words are still the same
If you transfer this argument: if flame
And smoke and ashes in some wood should hide,
It must have foreign substances inside
Which spring from it. An opportunity,
Though slight, remains to shun veracity,
Which Anaxagoras appropriates –
He says that everything incorporates
All things commingled, but the only thing
That comes to view is that embodying
The most, which can be seen closer to hand,
But from our reasoning this has been banned;
For we'd expect, when harvest grains are ground
By heavy stones, some blood might well be found
Or something that our bodies yield. Likewise,
When grass is rubbed, you'd think before your eyes
Gore would appear, and water would produce
Droplets similar to a sheep's sweet juice,
And from a clod of crumbled earth we'd find,
Perhaps, grains, leaves and grass of many a kind
Dispersed minutely, and in wood, maybe,
Smoke and ash and sparks of fire we'd see;
But since this is not true, then you must know
That there are no such things that mingle so,
But common seeds, in many ways combined,
Must be concealed there. 'But we often find,'
You say, 'that on the mountains tree-tops lean
And rub against each other when they've been

Attacked by fierce south winds till they're aflame
With blazing fire.' Maybe – but, all the same,
Fire's not inside the wood, but heat indeed
Contains within its essence many a seed,
Which rub and flow together and begin
A forest fire. If flame, though, lies within
The forests, it could not be out of sight
For long but soon would set the woods alight
And cause destruction. As I said of late,
You may observe, what carries quite a weight
Is how and with what things these germs are bound
Together and what motions can be found
Both given and received and, altering
Themselves a little, how they then can bring
Us wood and fire. So words in the same way
Use slight adjustments, although we portray
Those things with different names. Now, finally,
If you think that what you see openly
Can't be, unless you picture things are made
Of a like mature, then these things must fade
While cackling out loud and quivering
With mirth, their salty teardrops covering
Their cheeks and chins. Learn what is left and hear
Attentively! For things are far from clear,
I know; but I've great hopes that I'll be blessed
With fame, and love of the Muses strikes my breast;
I wander through the fields with vigorous mind,
Through which no other member of mankind

Has passed. To touch pure fountains gives me pleasure,
To pluck fresh flowers thrills me beyond all measure:
A splendid crown I'll seek to deck my head,
From where no human has been garlanded
By the Muses, since about great things I teach
And aim to free men's minds beyond the reach
Of dread religion, since my poetry
Brings clarity from such obscurity
And brings the Muses' charm to everything
(Indeed a reasonable offering,
It seems); but as physicians smear around
The cup some honey-juice when they have found
A young lad needs foul wormwood, whereby he
May drink it down, fooled by this strategy,
And thus recover, I, because the theme
That I'm expounding here will often seem
Bitter to neophytes and backed away
From by the mob, desire in that same way
To speak my doctrine in sweet poetry,
Sweet as the produce of the honey-bee,
Muse-sent, if I can hold you with my verse
Till you can comprehend the universe
And how things interweave. But since you know
That bodies, wholly dense, fly to and fro,
Unconquered through all time, let us now see
If there's a limit to their quantity
Or not, and likewise learn what has been found
As void or room or space, where things abound,

And see if it’s finite or stretches out,
A vast continuum. There is no doubt
That there is nothing with a boundary,
For if there were one there would have to be
Something beyond, and there is nothing there,
Unless there were yet something else somewhere
To set that limit so that one could see
Where our own innate senses cannot be
And since beside the sum we now confess
That there is nought, because it’s limitless.
It is of no account whatever place
You’re in, since each direction that you face
Displays infinity. Now let’s suppose
That space is finite: well, if someone throws
A spear out past the extreme shores, should we
Believe that it flows on extensively
To whence it came or does something suppress
Its movement, for you will have to profess
One or the other, but whatever way
You choose, you can’t escape, for you must say
That all is infinite. For whether there
Is anything that stops it going where
It has been sent, or else relentlessly
It flies straight on, it had no boundary
Where it set out. Wherever you elect
To place the furthest coasts, I’ll interject,
“What happens to the spear?” There will not be
A limit but a multiplicity

Of chances to go further. If the space
Of the totality were fixed in place
By certain coasts, then by a solid weight
All matter of the world would gravitate
Down to the bottom, and nothing could be
Beneath the sky, and in reality
There'd be no sky at all and no sunlight,
Since all, heaped up to a considerable height
From immemorial time, would lie. Repose,
However, is not given out to those
Elements since there is no place below,
No fundament to which they're able to flow
For rest. But everything is endlessly
In motion, and it's by infinity
Swift matter is supplied. Before our eyes
One thing's made from another – the supplies
Are endless. Air divides the hills; the earth
Creates the sea, and the sea gives birth
To it, and so it goes. The traits of space
Are such that even thunderbolts can't race
Across the endless tracts of time, nor may
They rest awhile while they go on their way;
There's such a huge abundance spread around
In all directions: lest a thing is bound
By limits, every body must enclose
Each void, each void each body, and this shows
That both of them possess no boundaries:
Unless it hemmed the other, one of these

Would be extended, stretched immeasurably,
And thus the earth, the bright-blue sky, the sea,
Mankind and the immortals could not stay
An hour in place, for all things, swept away,
Would through the massive void be borne, indeed
Would never have combined to be the seed
Of anything. For prime germs certainly
Did not with any perspicacity
Fashion themselves in order or decide
What movements for each one they should provide,
But, since they're multitudinous and change
In many ways among the All, they range
Abroad, pushed out and beaten, venturing
All kinds of movement and of coupling
Until they settle down eventually
With those designs through which totality
Is made: for countless years they've been protected
Now they acceptably have been projected
Into their proper motions – thus the sea
By all the streams is freshened constantly,
The earth, lapped by the vapours of the sun,
Brings forth new brood, all creatures, every one,
Flourish and all the gliding fires which flow
Above us yet live on. They could not, though,
Have managed this at all had no supply
Of matter risen from the void, whereby
They could repair lost things. With scarcity
Of food beasts waste away, while similarly

All things must fade when matter, blown aside
Somehow, is then unable to provide
Succour, nor from outside can blows maintain
The world's united sum. For blows can rain
Often and check a part while others come
Along, enabled to fill up the sum;
But meanwhile they are often forced to spring,
Thus to the primal germs contributing
A space and time for flight that they may be
Borne from this union to liberty.
So many things, we're brought to understand,
Must rise, and yet the blows must be at hand
Always in order that there'll always be
A force of matter universally.
Don't listen to those people who profess
That all things inward to the centre press,
Dear Memmius, and that the entire world
Stands firmly while no outward blows are hurled
Against it, since neither their depth nor height
Can be unbound and all things are pressed tight
Into the centre. Therefore, do not think
That heavy weights beneath the earth can shrink
Upon it, having striven from below
To settle upside down, as images show
Upon the ocean. They also propound
That every breathing thing wanders around
And can't fall up to the sky any more than we
Can reach the heavens by flying; when they see

The sun, the constellations of the night
Are what we view - we thus detach our sight
From theirs, our night coequal to their day.
These dreams have made these people fools since they
Embrace them faultily, for there can't be
A centre when there is infinity.
And if there is a centre, there's no thing
Could take its rest there by that reasoning
Any more than it could be thrust far away
By other reasoning. Now, what we say
Is void must yield to weights coequally
Through centre and non-centre, wherever they be
In motion. There's no place where bodies come
In which they may stand in a vacuum,
Lacking the force of weight; and no void may
Give aid to any, but it must give way,
True to its nature; by this theory,
Therefore, things can't be held in unity,
Their thirst for centre brought to nothingness.
Besides, since they claim not all bodies press
To centre, rather only those we know
Are of the earth and sea and swells that flow
From mountains, and all things that are contained
In earthen matter, but they have maintained
That the thin air and blazing fire are spread
Out of the centre – thus the sun is fed,
Around it all the ether quivering
With stars, because the hotness, taking wing,

Is gathered there, and tree-tops could not sprout
Their leaves unless their food was given out
From earth, for nature would have, by degrees,
Fed them through all the branches of the trees.
Their reasons are all incorrect, and they
Clash with each other also. I can say
That all is boundless, lest the walls of the world
Would act like winged flames and thus be hurled
Throughout the massive vacuum suddenly
And other things would follow similarly,
And all the innermost regions of the sky
Should fall and under us the earth would fly
Away at once through void till suddenly
There'd be nought left except infinity
And unseen stuff. Wherever you decide
Prime germs are lacking, on that very side
Will be the door of death, and through that door
Out and abroad a throng of matter will pour.
With little trouble you'll find all things clear
Gradually – the road won't disappear.
You'll see all nature, learning them anew
And torches will light other things for you.

BOOK II

It’s sweet, when mighty waves stir up the sea,
To see a sailor toiling desperately;
Not that we joy in someone else’s plight
But being spared from ills brings us delight.
To view a skirmish on the battleground
Is sweet as well when one is safe and sound.
But there is nothing sweeter than to dwell
In lofty temples that are guarded well
By wise men, when you see folk wandering,
Scattering here and there and essaying
To find the road of life: they’re envious
In standing, rivals, too, in genius,
Labouring night and day industriously
To reach the top and capture mastery
Of all the world. What wretched minds, how blind
Your hearts! O the great perils of mankind,
The darkness in a life of brevity!
For nature barks out nothing – don’t you see? –
But a desire to keep away the pain,
Disjointed from our bodies, and maintain
A life empty of care and fear. Therefore
Our bodies have a need for little more
Than ousting pain. We can occasionally
Enjoy more pleasures, for no luxury
Does nature need – no statues, made of gold,
Of stripling lads who in their hands may hold

Bright torches requisite for banqueting,
A house with gold and silver glittering
Or harps that make the golden ceilings high
Above resound, because with friends to lie
Upon soft grass with no profuse outlay
Beneath a high tree's branches as they sway
Above can energize one, specially
When all the elements are merrily
Laughing and seasonable flowers grow.
Your burning fevers won't more quickly go
If you on woven sheets or red robes spread
Your limbs than if upon a pauper's bed
You lie. So since wealth, high rank and great fame
Are of no use to anybody's frame,
Assume that they do not avail the mind
As well, except when you see legions lined
In rows to mimic war, on either side
With horse and great auxiliaries supplied
And armed ships, gripped with one determination,
For then religion, filled with trepidation
At this, will fly away and leave us free
Of care. But if we think this drollery
And that mankind does not shrink from the din
Of clashing weapons, since they flourish in
The company of monarchs of esteem,
Not overawed with gold and robes that gleam
With purple, why, then, doubt that reasoning,
And nothing else, can help with everything

I mentioned, since life labours in the mirk?
As boys are scared of all things that may lurk
In darkness, we fear sometimes in the light
Those things that in no way should ever fright
Anyone more than what boys in darkness dread,
Imaging some monster lies ahead.
This terror, then, this dark imagined by
The mind is not by light shafts in the sky
Or morning gleam dispersed but reasoning
And nature's law. I'll start untangling
Right now how everything has been created,
Then broken down, and what necessitated
Their motions so that they can travel through
A giant void. Attend, I beg of you!
For matter won't cohere because we see
That all things are diminished gradually
In time and leave our sight when old, although
The sun remains unharmed. When bodies go
From each thing they diminish what they leave,
But what they then arrive at will receive
Increase from them. The former waste away,
The latter bloom; the bodies do not stay,
However. Thus the sum's renewed, and we
Mortals live on in reciprocity.
Some nations, wax, some wane. In a brief space
The eras alter and, as In a race,
The lamp of life's passed on. But if your view
Is that prime germs can cease and, when they do,

They spawn new motions, from the truth you stray.
For since throughout the void they make their way,
By their, or something else's, gravity
They must be carried. For when frequently
They clash, they leap apart, because they are
Heavy and firm with nothing there to bar
Their way behind them. So that you may see
These primal germs are darting randomly
About, remember that there is no base
In that entire sum – no resting-place –
Since space is boundless, spread on every side.
By motions mixed, when some of them collide,
Some bounce back with large gaps between, although
Some leave but little space, knocked by the blow.
Tangled with various shapes, they constitute
Great bulks of iron and many a rocky root
And others of their kind, while some few stray
Through the vast void: the rest leap far away,
Recoiling, leaving massive gaps: thus we
Receive the air and solar radiancy.
Through the huge void go many that are cast
From matter that had linked and clung on fast,
By unions spurned, unable to unite
Their motions with the rest. Within our sight
(As I record) an image will arise,
For when sunlight appears before your eyes
In gloomy halls many particles you'll see,
Mixed with the light and battling endlessly

Meeting and parting, group by group; you may
Assume by this that prime seeds make their way
Through the great vacuum, tossed about, and so
We see, at least, that little things may show
Us copies of great things and give insight
So you should see them tumbling in the light,
For they show motions of prime matter, too,
That lies beneath them, lurking far from view.
You'll then see many things, with many a blow
From hidden things, change course and backward go,
Spreading out far and wide. Thus I suppose
This movement from primeval atoms rose.
Prime seeds move of themselves primarily,
Then bodies closest to the energy
Of primal seeds, by tiny compounds tied,
Are beaten by a wealth of blows that hide
From them, and then they beat the next in size.
Thus from primevals on motions will rise
And reach our senses incrementally,
Until those objects move as well, which we
Can see in sunlight, although no-one knows
At all from which direction come the blows.
Now, Memmius, you soon will learn the speed
Of atoms: when Aurora stirs each breed
Of birds by sprinkling light upon the ground
And causes them to flutter all around
The trackless groves and fill with melody
The mellow air. We see how suddenly

The sun arises, spreading out her rays,
And how she clothes the world with her displays
Of pomp. The vapour and the light that she
Sends out does not go through a vacancy;
They're forced to slow down, then, when they divide
The air's waves, as it were; now, as they glide,
Atoms of heat don't travel singularly,
Entangled as they are, and each will be
Restrained without by each till they're compelled
To slow down. Those firm atoms, though, not held
By anything outside them as through space
They go, their parts one unit, to the place
They started out for, carried forcefully,
Must travel with a greater velocity
Than sunlight, rushing through a space more vast
Just as around the sky the sun has cast
Its splendour… And the gods do not pursue
Each primal element that they might view
How each thing happens. This some men oppose
And, ignorant of matter, they suppose
Without the force of some divinity
Nature could not, in ways that equally
Mirror the needs of mankind, turn about
The seasons of the year and cause to sprout
The grains and everything divine delight,
Life's guide, persuades us to so that we might
Through love create each age lest all mankind
Should die. But while they hold this in their mind,

They seem to lapse from truth a goodly way.
For even if I could not truly say
What prime germs are, yet I would still declare,
Through studying the matter in the air,
And many other things, no god created
The nature of the world – it has been weighted
With countless flaws. Later I'll make this clear,
Memmius. Now what remains for you to hear
Om motions I'll explain, for this fact, too,
I think I should now clarify for you:
No bodily thing by its own agency
Can go or be borne upward – do not be
Deceived by flames, for they were formed to go
Upward, and through this increase upward grow
Bright grain and trees, and all the weight that lies
Within them bears them down. When fire flies
Up to the rooftops where it laps away
At beam and timber, we suppose that they
Act of heir own accord, no force below
Urging them up. Blood operates just so,
Discharged from bodies, spurting out its gore
And spattering. Have you not seen before
With what great forcefulness will water spew
Out beams and timbers? For the more that you
Press deeper down with all your might and main,
The more it heaves and flings them back again
That, more than half their length, they may arise
On rebound. Yet we don't doubt, I surmise,

Their weight bears downward through the void. Just so
Flames under pressure should rise up, although
Their weight strives hard to draw them down. Tell me,
Have you seen meteors sweep majestically,
Drawing long trails of fire in the air
Wherever Nature grants a thoroughfare
And constellations drop down? Even the sun
From heaven sheds its light for everyone,
Sowing the fields, and onto lands, therefore,
As well. Athwart the rainstorms, furthermore,
There's lightning, where you see the fires clash
Out of the clouds as here and there they dash
And fall to earth. Also, I'd have you know
That atoms, as by their own weight they go
Down through the empty space, quite randomly
And in quite random places, minimally
Change course. If they did not, they'd surely drop
Down through the yawning void and cause a stop
To impacts and to blows, developing
From primal elements. Thus not a thing
Would have been made by Nature. If maybe
Someone thinks heavier bodies, rapidly
Carried straight down the void, could strike a blow
Upon the lighter ones that are below
And make them move, he's wandered far from all
True reasoning. For all those things that fall
Through air and water must accelerate
As they descend depending on the weight

Of each, since air and water can't impede
Things equally, and therefore they must cede
To heavier things; but in no way, no place
Can anything be blocked by empty space,
Which, true to Nature's law, yields logically.
Thus all things moving, though their weights may be
Unequal, must rush down with equal speed
Through the still void. So heavier things indeed
Can't from above strike lighter ones and thus
Cause them to move in manners various
By Nature's purpose; atoms, though, must swerve
A little, yet, that we don't think they curve
(Which every fact refutes), but minimally.
For we see this is plain immediately.
Whatever their weight, they cannot, as they go
Downward, obliquely move – that this is so
We must believe, but who could see at all
That bodies sheer off in their downward fall?
If motions all are linked eternally
And new replaces old immutably,
And atoms by their swerving don't begin
New motion, thereby interfering in
The rules of fate, that everlastingly
Cause does not follow cause, how can there be
Free will in every creature everywhere,
Wrested from fate, through which, wherever we care
To go, we do our will, while similarly
We change our movements, but not fixedly

In time or place but rather as our mind
Impels us? For it is not hard to find
That men's will gives the start, and then, conveyed
Throughout the limbs, mobility is made.
When the gates are open, don't you see a horse
Can't move at once, though eager, down the course?
All bodily matter must be stimulated
So that the mind's desire is activated.
And thus you'll understand that movements' start
Is fabricated from a willing heart
And then through the entire frame they go.
It's not the same when we're struck by a blow,
Delivered by another, for we see
That we are forced to move unwillingly
Until the will controls it. Thus, although
Often some outer force drives many to go
Onward headlong, within our breasts there lies
The strength to fight them. There are great supplies
OF germs, therefore, that sometimes turn aside,
Push forward and then, curbed, again subside.
As well as blows and weights, you must agree,
Are other causes of mobility
In seeds whence comes our power, since we must state
That nothing comes from nothing, because weight
Stops blows from causing everything to be
Created. That there's no necessity,
However, in one's mind and there's nothing
To make one suffer, like some conquered thing,

The elements have a tiny inclination
At no fixed time and in no fixed location.
Never was stuff so crammed or, by contrast,
Extending over intervals so vast.
Nothing increases, nothing is taken away,
On which account, just as they move today
They moved of old and will henceforth so move,
And what was formed in previous times will prove
To be so formed again and grow in power,
As Nature has decreed for them, and flower.
Their sum can never change; there is no place
To which any kind of material can race
Or whence a fresh supply of it can sprout
And change the form of things and turn about
Their motions. Do not be surprised to know
That, though all seeds are always on the go,
The sum seems motionless, excepting when
A thing moves as a whole: beneath the ken
Of our five senses lies the entity
Of these prime germs whereby, though you can’t see,
They must conceal their movements. For indeed
It often happens that things which we heed
From afar yet do the same. For happy sheep,
While cropping a hillside’s grass, will often creep
About, freshly bedewed, their lambs replete
And frolicking about as they compete
In locking horns: far off they seem to us
A patch of gleaming white, but nebulous,

Upon green hills. Moreover, we can see
Great troops performing an epitome
Of war upon the plain as on they race
And lustre rises up to meet the face
Of heaven and over earth the bronze greaves flash
As warriors' feet make thunder as they dash
Onward and all the mountains thereabouts
Echo up to the stars their warlike shouts,
When straight across the plain the cavalry
At once comes flying, beating vigorously
The ground beneath them. Nonetheless they seem
From high up on the hills a splendid gleam.
The origins of all things you must know,
Their shapes and all the differences they show.
Few have like shapes and not all seem to be
Like to each other: not surprisingly,
Since they embody such a huge supply
Of things that they are limitless, as I
Have shown: they're not identical, it's clear,
Not totally alike, yet they appear
To have a similar shape and size. Indeed
The race of men, fish, sheep, cattle that feed
On pastures, wild beasts, birds of every sort,
Which round the banks and springs and lakes cavort
And haunt secluded groves and fly around –
Pick any breed of them and they'll be found
Quite different in shape, each to the other,
And thus the chick will recognize its mother,

And she it, just like all humanity.
Often before a temple you may see
A slaughtered calf on an altar decorated
With incense, warm blood having emanated.
Its mother roams the green fields, dispossessed
Of her young child, and sees its hoofprints pressed
Into the ground and with her searching eyes
Checks everywhere and fills the grove with sighs
And visits and revisits constantly
Their stall in longing for her progeny.
Soft willow shoots nor grasses fresh with dew
Nor overflowing streams can nothing do
To bring her comfort or to give her ease
In this fresh pain. When other calves she sees
In joyful fields, she can't allay her care,
Determinedly searching everywhere
For something of her own that she knows well.
The quavering, tender kids can easily tell
Their mothers, and the lambs that frisk and leap
Can recognize the flocks of bleating sheep.
By Nature's rules, then, each lamb normally
Runs down to drink its mother's quantity
Of milk. But grains of corn will never show
That they're so much alike but that we know
They have some difference in their shape. We see
Shells, too, like that, their multiplicity
Painting the earth, where on the thirsty sand
The soft sea-waves beat on the curving strand.

I must say yet again that in this way
The prime beginnings of all things, since they
Exist by Nature and are not created
By hand or from one atom formulated,
Must each of them be fashioned differently
As here and there they fly. We easily
Can explicate by human reasoning
Why fire that we see in lightning
Produces a more penetrating flow
Than does the fire on torches here below.
The former is more slender and is made
Of smaller shapes and therefore can invade
Openings through which our fires can't proceed
Because they're made of wood and are indeed
Mere torches and, besides, light passes through
A horn, but rain does not. How is this true?
Bodies of light have less capacity
Than those that make up water. We may see
Wine swiftly straining through a sieve, although,
In contrast, olive oil is very slow
Because its seeds are larger or, maybe,
They are more hooked and meshed more narrowly:
Therefore the atoms cannot separate
So suddenly and singly emanate
Through their own openings. The quality
Of milk and honey's liquid certainly
Is pleasing to the taste, but hardly good
Is harsh centaury and loathsome wormwood -

They twist the mouth; so you can easily
Know that those bodies that give joy to me
Are smooth and round, but quite the opposite
Are harsh and bitter ones that never sit
With pleasure in the mouth, for they are more
Connected by their atoms, and therefore
They tear into our senses, shattering
The texture of the body. Everything
We find it disagreeable to touch
Or not are in conflict, since they have such
Dissimilar shapes: no atoms are as slick
In harsh saws as in music one may pick
With nimble fingers, thus awakening
One's harp, producing shapes with every string;
Prime things of similar shape do not infest
Men's nostrils when foul corpses, laid to rest,
Are roasting, while the stage is freshly sprayed
With Cilician saffron and the shrine is laid
With Arabian scents; fine hues which greet one's eye
Do not consist of seeds which make one cry
Or tingle, nor those vile and hideous.
For there is not one thing that comforts us
Not first created with some entity
That's smooth. Nevertheless, contrarily
Vile things have yet been noted to possess
Some roughness. Others which we may assess
As neither smooth nor hooked with points that bend
Have small projecting angles that can send

Us pleasant feelings, not injurious;
Such things of this kind that are used by us
Are flavours that are found in elecampane
And burnt tartar that's found in wine. Again,
Hot fire and cold frost, toothed differently,
Both perforate our bodies. Certainly
Touch is a sense, whether something from outside
Is pierced in us or we are hurt inside
Or through the act of love comes ecstasy
Or else the seeds engender anarchy
And daze the senses, as if you, although
With your own hand, would now inflict a blow.
On some part of your frame. We must agree,
Then, that they have a multiplicity
Of shapes, since they produce such various
Sensations. And whatever seems to us
Hard and close-set has, of necessity,
Organs more closely hooked and thoroughly
Combined in branch-like shapes. Among the first
Are diamond stones, which many times have cursed
Blows rained upon them, iron and hard rocks
And bronze which shrieks as it resists its locks.
The elements of liquid are more round
And smooth because, as you have surely found,
A poppy seed's scooped up as easily
As water, since those round grains cannot be
A hindrance to each other, and that seed,
When knocked down, runs downhill with equal speed.

All things that we see suddenly upward go,
Like smoke and clouds and flame, aren't forced, although
Not made of smooth and round grains totally,
To be entangled inextricably
By elements so that they may then sting
The body, piercing rocks but not clinging
Together; what pricks our bodies must possess
Sharp but unclustered grains: you must profess
That there exists a similarity
Between bitter and fluid, as we see
In the sea's brine, for elements smooth and round
Exist in water: rough things have been found
That cause pain, mingled with them. Nonetheless
They still need not be hooked: you'd rightly guess
They're round because they're rough that they may go
Forward, inflicting pain. That you may know
More clearly that Neptune's acerbic sea
Is made by rough and smooth cooperatively,
There is a way to part them, when we find
How the sweet water, once it's been refined
Often through earth, into a pit then flows
Separately, when all its saltiness goes
Away, because it leaves above the ground
The foul brine's grains, while the rough ones are bound
To stick into the earth more easily.
I'll try to add another verity
That's proved by this – prime things do not possess
A multitude of shapes that's limitless.

For otherwise some seeds would have to be
Of infinite size. For one small entity
Can’t have two different shapes: well then, surmise
Prime germs have three small parts (or aggrandize
That sum to just a few more): side to side
Place them, and top to bottom, having tried
All possible patterns and if, after all,
You wish to change the shapes, you must install
More parts; thence it must follow logistically
That others must be added similarly
If you should wish to change the shapes again:
New shapes imply increase in volume, then.
So it’s impossible to think a seed
Has infinite differing shapes, unless some need
To be of boundless size, since recently
I proved to you that this just cannot be.
Barbaric clothes and robes dyed from the hue
Of shells from Thessaly, I’m telling you,
And golden peacocks steeped in laughing grace,
Outdone by some fresh hue, would lose their place
Of wonder. Honey’s taste and myrrh would be
Despised; the swan’s and Phoebus’ melody,
The wondrous art of strings, would be oppressed
And silenced. Things more splendid than the rest
Would constantly arise, and possibly
All things might change back for the worse, as we
Have said some might improve. For one thing may
Prove more abhorrent, in a backwards way,

Than others to the eyes, ears, mouth and nose.
Buts since this is not so, we must suppose
That since a certain limit was consigned
To things, forcing the sum to be confined
On either side, there has to be a bound
Fixed to the sum of shapes. It has been found
The path from heat to frost is limited
As well, for every step's distributed
Backwards in the same way: it is seen
Heat, cold and middle warmth all lie between
These two extremes, thus filling up the score
Successively. Created things, therefore,
Are different by limited degrees
Since they are marked at both extremities
By two points placed at either end, beset
This side by flame and that by frost. Now let
Me link it to another verity
Which draws its proof from it: all primary
Objects of similar shape are limitless.
Since different shapes are finite, one would guess
That similar ones aren't, or alternatively
We would be forced to say the quantity
Of matter is finite, which is not so,
As I have proved, and in my verse I show
The sum of all things from infinity
Is held in place uninterruptedly,
Though struck by many blows on every side,
By tiny grains of matter. Though you've spied

Rare creatures that are less prolific than
Other creatures, yet if you began to scan
Some other climates far away, you'd find
That they are filled with many of that kind –
For instance elephants, especially,
Which form a palisade of ivory
In India in thousands to exclude
Strangers: they are such a multitude,
Though here in Italy we see but few.
Nevertheless, that I may grant this, too,
Imagine that one thing that's suffered birth
Stands out unique, like nothing else on earth.
But one may say, unless the matter's sum
Is infinite, enabling it to come
To life, it won't be made that it might grow
And be sustained. If I may further go,
Suggesting that the bodies that came out
Of this one thing were finite, tossed about
The world, where, whence, how, with what energy
Will they meet and combine in such a sea
Of matter and in such an alien crowd?
I do not think that they could be allowed
To mix; when ships are wrecked, the sea will cast
Asunder many things – rib, transom, mast,
Prow, yard, oar, all floating around,
And the stern ornaments will seem to sound
A warning to avoid the treacherous sea,
Its lures, its violence and its trickery –

So doubt its shifty smile as there it lies
Serene – in this way, if you should surmise
That primal things are finite, they will be
Forced to be scattered through eternity
And sundered by their stuff and never flow
By force into each other and not grow
Together. Notwithstanding, both things do
These very things. Therefore it's obvious, too,
That in prime things there's an infinity
Of all things that are furnished openly.
Nor can death-dealing movements dominate
Forever or for all time extirpate
Life. Having given birth and caused a gain
In growth in things, they yet cannot sustain
Them always Their war, from infinity
Pursued, is waged somewhat debatably.
The vital elements will get the best
Of others here and there yet are suppressed
In the same way. The funeral threnody
And the wail that babies raise when first they see
The light of day are mingled. For no night
That follows day nor any morning light
Has never heard those new-born, sickly cries
Attending the laments that symbolize
Black funerals. Lock this in your memory, too:
That of those objects which are in plain view
There's nothing that possesses just one kind
Of element or does not have, combined

Within it, various seeds: the more one sees
A thing has many powers and faculties,
The plainer it becomes that it confines
Most kinds of atoms and diverse designs.
The earth contains first bodies of all things,
Whence, rolling coolness tirelessly, the springs
Renew the boundless sea, because within
Herself the earth contains the origin
Of fire. In many lands below the ground
The earth's ablaze, and from the depths are found
Etna's white-hot eruptions. Furthermore
The earth contains within her very core
The means whereby there rise up fruitful trees
And grain to feed all nationalities,
Rivers and trees and fruitful fields to feed
The mountain-ranging beasts. And that indeed
Is why all mortals call her Cybele,
The Splendid Mother of each deity
And beasts and mortals. Grecian bards of old
Have often sung about her and have told
That in her chariot she drives a pair
Of lions, teaching that the spacious air
Holds the great universe, and earth can't lie
On earth. Perhaps you ask the reason why
The beasts are yoked? Their young, however wild,
Ought to be calmed and tempered by the mild
Acts of their parents. They have placed around
Her head a mural crown since, hemmed in sound

Positions, she supports our cities: she
Now wears it as she‘s borne horrifically
Across the earth and there is many a nation
That renders ancient ritual adoration
To the Idaean mother as she’s led
By Phrygian troops because, as it is said,
It’s from those regions corn was first created
And round the world was then disseminated.
They gave her eunuchs. Why? Because those who
Refused to pay her majesty its due
And to their parents showed no gratitude
Were thought unworthy to create a brood
Of children. The taut tom-toms thundering
Beneath the palms and cymbals echoing,
The raucous horns ring out, awakening fright,
And hollow Phrygian pipes cause much delight;
They carry martial arms to signify
Their violent fury and to terrify
The bad and thankless through the majesty
Of the goddess as she goes silently
Along and blesses mortals: then they spray
Copper and silver as she makes her way,
Enriching thus the path on which she rides,
And cast a shower of rose-flowers which hide
Her and her escort. And now in her way
Is an armed squadron with the soubriquet
Of Curetes, because they love to sport
Among the Phrygian bands and to cavort

In rhythmic leaps, in bloodshed revelling,
Nodding their heads, their dread crests shivering,
Like the Curetes on Dicte in Crete
Who, it's reported, managed to secrete
The wailing Jupiter. They dance around
One of their number rapidly, all bound
In armour, bronze upon bronze clamouring,
Lest Saturn eat him, thus delivering
An everlasting wound to Cybele.
That's why she's guarded by this company,
Or maybe it's because they signify
That they're always prepared to fortify
And arm their native land and to defend
With pride their parents. All this is well-penned
Yet far from reason. For divinity
By nature must have immortality
And deepest peace and evermore remain
Apart from us, in safety, free of pain,
Not needing us, strong, not propitiated
With services and never aggravated.
The earth always lacks sense: to the sun's rays
Many things are brought in many different ways
Only because many prime entities
Are given it. If you should call the seas
Neptune and corn Ceres and do the same
By giving to your wine the different name
Of Bacchus, then we all ought to agree
To think of the whole world as Cybele

As long as in reality your mind
Is free of base religion. You will find
Sheep, steeds and hornèd cattle pasturing
Together and from one stream swallowing
Its water, though each breed is not the same
And each retains the nature whence it came
And each its shape. A great diversity
Can be perceived in each variety
Of feed and river. Every beast contains
Bones, blood, warmth, sinews, fluid, flesh and veins;
They're all dissimilar, too, for they are blent
With primal germs whose shapes are different.
Whatever has been kindled, furthermore,
And burned, if nothing else, contains a store
Of bodies that enable them to throw
Out fire and shoot up light and make things glow
In embers which they scatter all around.
Pore through the rest likewise and there'll be found
In them the seeds of many things concealed
With various shapes. Many things will be revealed
That have within them colour, smell and flavour,
Chiefly the offerings that beg the favour
Of gods. They must have various shapes – rank smell
Can pierce one's frame where colour cannot dwell.
In different ways colour and flavour steal
Into our senses and thereby reveal
The prime germs' different shapes. Unlike shapes meet
In one great lump, and all things are replete

With mingled seeds. Throughout my poetry
Many elements enjoy a harmony
With many words, although you must concede
That words and verse are different and indeed
Have different elements. I'd mislead you
If I said common letters were but few
In all my verse or that, if I compare
Two words, there are no elements they share,
But all are not like all. The same we see
Elsewhere, for there's a similarity
In many primal germs, and yet the sum
Of them will seem quite different when they come
Together; thus it can be rightly stated
That man and corn and trees originated
From different germs. Yet it must not be thought
That all things have in every way been brought
Together, since you then would commonly
See every kind of freak monstrosity,
Half-man, half-beast, high branches blossoming
From living beings and the coupling
Of limbs possessed by creatures of the sea
And those of land, Chimaeras noisomely
Breathing flame from their throats through lands that grow
All things. But it's not clear that this is so,
Since all things a specific mother breeds,
Originating from specific seeds,
Conserve their kind while growing. Certainly
This argues a specific strategy,

Because the body of each thing is spread
Throughout its frame by that on which it's fed,
Which activates the movements fittingly.
But on the other hand we also see
Some alien elements which Nature throws
Back on the earth, and many, struck by blows,
Escape with bodies that we cannot see –
They can't connect with any entity:
The vital motions they do not perceive
Nor imitate. In case you should believe
That only beasts are held by these decrees,
The same precept keeps, by its boundaries,
All things apart. Since all things are created
As different, they must be formulated
With different shapes. I don't say very few
Have the same shape but I am telling you
All's not like all. And further, since the seeds
Are different from each other they must needs
Differ in gaps, vents, meetings, motions, weights,
Connections, blows, each of which separates
Not only beasts but keeps apart the sea
And earth and keeps the earth from heaven. Now be
Heedful to what I've happily toiled to bring
To you, and do not think that each white thing
You see comes from white atoms, or likewise
What's black or any hue before your eyes.
In elements of matter there's no hue,
Be they alike or unlike. And if you

Believe the mind's unable to propel
Itself into each these bodies' natures, well,
You miss the mark. A man who's lacking sight,
Who never from his birth beheld the light
Of day, can know a body by the way
He touches it, so we can surely say
That bodies lacking hue of any kind
Can yet become a concept of the mind.
When we touch something in some pitch-black place,
We feel no colours painted on its face.
I've proved this, so I now will spell it out –
Every primordial body is without
A colour. Colours change while changing, too,
Themselves, a thing prime germs must never do;
Something unchangeable must survive, in case
All things go retrograde and have to face
Their doom: those things which change their form and go
Beyond their boundaries must die. And so
Don't colour seeds lest everything go back
To nothing. Furthermore, should prime germs lack
The quality of colour, though endowed
With various shapes which give to them a crowd
Of colours, for it matters much how they
Are linked and what activities they may
Give and receive, at once you'd easily
Explain how something that but recently
Was black is now pure white: and it's just so
With seas, when massive winds begin to blow

And stir them up, thus giving them the sheen
Of hoary waves; for you'd say that what's been
Black, when its matter's mixed and the array
Of prime germs changed, with some things moved away
And others added, now seem white. However,
If the sea were formed of blue seeds, it could never
Become white; if you jumble up what's blue
In any way, it cannot change its hue
To white If the different seeds that give the sea
Its perfect brightness had a variety
Of colours, as a square thing is created
To make one shape, yet out of variegated
Figures and shapes, it's fitting that, as there
Are shapes that are unlike within a square,
We see upon the surface of the sea
Or any bright thing a variety
Of different colours: and there's not one thing
That keeps these unlike shapes from fashioning
It square on the outside. Nevertheless,
That mixture bars a single lustrousness
Within it, and the reason we've assigned
Colours to first beginnings you will find
Falters, since white from white can't be created,
Nor black from black – they come from variegated
Colours. White things can rise with more success,
In fact, from something that is colourless
Than black or any colour, for they fight
Against it. Since colours must not lack light

And prime beginnings, on the contrary,
Do not merge from dark, assuredly
By colour they are never overspread.
For how can it be genuinely said
That colour lives in darkness? By the light
Itself it's changed, according to how bright
Its impact is. A dove's plumage is seen
Likewise whenever the sun highlights its sheen
About its neck: sometimes it seems to be
As red as bronze but sometimes, when you see
It at a different angle, you will view
It as a mix of emerald green and blue.
The peacock's tail, suffused with plenteous light,
Shows, as it turns about, a different sight;
Since light creates these colours, don't divine
That they can be produced without the shine
Of light. The eye receives one kind of blow
When it sees white but quite another, though,
When it sees black or any other hue;
As well, the colour of the thing that you
Have touched doesn't matter rather than the way
It's built: thus first beginnings, we may say,
Do not need hues but give out various
Species of touch with multifarious
Shapes. Since no fixed colour, furthermore,
Is parcelled to each fixed shape, and the store
Of prime germs' fabric we can ascertain
In any hue, why are things that contain

Those shapes not likewise painted with a dye
Of various colours? Crows should, as they fly,
Frequently from white plumes show a white hue,
And swans should be made black from black seeds, too,
Or any other hue, whether it be
Single or mottled. And, additionally,
The more minute the particles when they
Are split up, the more readily we may
See colours slowly fade, as, when you pull
And tear into small parts some purple wool,
Purple and scarlet, brightest of all hues,
Are totally destroyed; thus you may use
This fact to learn that particles breathe away
The colours that they have before they stray
Into things' seeds. And lastly, you can tell
That not all bodies have a sound or smell.
We can't perceive all things, and thus it's clear
That some things have no hue, nor can one hear
Them make a sound. The wise perceive both these
And those devoid of other qualities.
But do not think first bodies lack just hue –
They're devoid of warmth, cold and strong heat, too,
Wholly deprived of sound and dry of juice:
And from within themselves they can't produce
An odour. As when you start to prepare
Sweet marjoram and nard, which through the air
Sends nectar's breath, and myrrh, first ferret out
A jar of olive oil which is without

Scent that it hardly with its pungency
Destroys the scents in the miscellany
Of foods – it's by the self-same reasoning
Prime germs must not add smell to anything -
Cold, heat, warmth, and all other things: since these
By nature have ephemeral qualities –
Friable, pliant, spongy, rarefied –
They must from primal germs be set aside
To make things permanent lest we should see
All things returning to obscurity.
Now of necessity we must confess
Things that we see have feeling nonetheless
Have senseless primal germs. Facts obvious
To everyone, facts plainly known to us,
Don't contradict this: rather by the hand
They take us, forcing us to understand
That out of first beginning which possess
No feeling beasts are born. Why, from a mess
Of stinking dung, live worms arise, a flood
Fouling the earth and turning it to mud;
All things change likewise: rivers, it is seen,
And foliage and pastures lush and green
Change into beasts and beasts sequentially
Change into us; and from us frequently
Strong beasts and birds all grow and multiply.
All foods become live bodies, and thereby
Through nature creatures' feelings are created
In the same way as sticks are animated,

Producing flames. And therefore don’t you see
The import placed upon the symmetry
Of prime germs and with what they’re coalesced
Thus to engender motions and be blessed
By motions, too? What is it, furthermore,
That strikes the mind, forcing it to explore
Feelings, thus stopping you from crediting
The sensible being born from anything
Insensible? It’s surely that the earth
And sticks and stones are mixed and can’t give birth
To vital sense. I am not saying, though,
That all things in our universe can grow
From what makes sensible things. But still, the size
Of what does make them you must realize
Is crucial, and the shape, and, finally,
Each order, angle and activity.
In clods and sticks we don’t see them, although
When they are putrefied by air, they grow
Small worms because the bodies are combined
In a position of a different kind
Than formerly so that they may create
Live creatures. Furthermore, those folk who state
That things which feel come from those things which gain
Their sense from other elements maintain
The seeds, being soft, must have mortality.
For all sensation’s a miscellany
Of sinews, flesh and veins, and every one
Is soft and thus formed in a union

Of mortal substance. Grant then, anyway,
That they're eternal: definitely they
Must feel they are a body's part or be
Believed to have the similarity
Of complete animals. But we must say
They can't feel separately in any way.
For every body part has a relation
To something else: none can retain sensation
Alone. Thus it remains that they should be
Like complete animals, and just as we
Feel things,so should they, too: and thus they can
Feel all sensations that preserve a man.
So how will it be possible to call
Them prime germs and immortal when they all
Are living things, which are one and the same
As mortals? Even supposing that we claim
They could be, yet by link and combination
They merely would produce a congregation
Of living things, for men, and creatures too,
Could not by coupling make something new.
But were they to remove their own sensation
And take another one, what implication
In crediting the one they took away
Is there? And furthermore, so that we may
Go back a while – some birds' eggs we have found
Become live chicks and worms seethe from the ground
After excessive rains have putrefied
The earth, be sure feeling can be supplied

By what can’t feel. But if someone should say
That’s true through change or by another way,
Like birth, I’ll prove to him there cannot be
A birth unless a link has formerly
Been made and nought except by combination
Can change. Firstly, there can be no sensation
Before birth since the matter is dispelled
Through rivers, air and earth, where it’s then held;
Still separate, the matter of each thing
Can’t trigger vital moves, thus triggering
Those all-perceiving feelings, which then shield
Each living thing, though suddenly these may yield
To some swift blow that Nature cannot bear,
Confusing mind and body everywhere.
Prime germs’ arrangements are disintegrated
And vital motions utterly frustrated
Till matter through the body is dispelled
And vital knots of soul are then expelled
Through all the pores. What else, then, can such blows
Do but break up all things, do you suppose?
The vital motions left will frequently
Prevail when they’ve been struck less violently
And calm the blow and call back everything
And shake off death, which then is swaggering,
Rekindling those sensations nearly lost.
How else can those live things that almost crossed
Death’s threshold come back with their minds now whole
Once more rather than continue to that goal

They almost reached and die? And furthermore,
When matter is severely crushed, it's sore
And trembles, but it fells soothing delight
When it moves back to its original site;
Yet you should know that first germs feel no pain
Nor happiness because they don't contain
Elements, untroubled by the novelty
Of motions, free, too of felicity.
Again, if feeling has to be assigned
To atoms so live things of every kind
May feel as well, what of humanity?
They shake with laughter, laugh outrageously,
Of course, and weep so that their tears bedew
Their cheeks and speak of composition, too,
Profoundly, going further to survey
In depth their first beginnings; and since they
Are like whole mortals, they must then be gained
From other elements which were attained
From other elements – thus you'd not dare
To make a stand securely anywhere.
I will go further – everything you attest
Can laugh and hold a conversation, blessed
With wisdom, comes from things which actually
Do all those things. But if we should agree
That all of this is pure delirium
And laughers from non-laughing things can come
And those who have reason and eloquence
Are born of seeds that do not have a sense

Of either thing, why shouldn't the things that we
Perceive are capable of feeling be
Composed of seeds that aren't? All of us came
From heavenly seed – our fathers are the same,
Whose water is produced to foster us
On Mother Earth who spawns luxurious
Trees, shining harvests, a miscellany
Of savage beasts and all humanity,
Providing food to give sweet life to us
As we beget our offspring: and it's thus
That she is called our mother. What evolves
Out of the earth back to earth resolves
And what fell from the regions of the sky
Is brought back to their temples by and by.
Death does not kill things to annihilate
The bodies' matter but to dissipate
Their links abroad, and once more it combines
Others with others – thus they change their lines
And colours, gaining feeling which they then
At one particular time give back again;
Learn, then, by what and in what kind of array
These germs are linked up and what motions they
Give and receive. Therefore do not profess
That prime germs don't eternally possess
Things floating on the face of anything,
Sometimes being born and sharply perishing.
Moreover, in what and in what array
Each element's located I must say

Here in my poem: sky, rivers, earth, sun, sea,
All crops, all animals and every tree
Have the same letters in the words; although
They are not all alike, yet they are so
For the most part; the difference, though, is based
Upon the way each element is placed.
In real things, too, in matter's combinations,
Their motions, order, structure and locations,
The thing also must change. Now turn your mind
To reason: something of a different kind
Is keen to reach your ears – a very new
Side of creation wants to speak to you.
We may believe some things at first, but then
Others there are which by degrees all men
Begin to doubt. Consider first of all
The clear blue sky and what it holds withal,
The constellations, moon, the dazzling sun –
If they were now revealed to everyone
On earth out of the blue, then they would say
That it is even greater than what they
Had once thought nonpareil. Assuredly,
They would, for such a splendid sight to see
It must then be. But now it is a bore
And everyone is happy to ignore
Those shining temples. Forbear, then, to be
Electrified by simple novelty:
Use your keen judgment, and if things seem fact,
Give up, if false, prepare yourself to act

The soldier. For since space is limitless
Beyond the world that now imprisons us,
The mind desires to understand what lies
Beyond our ken as its projection flies
Free of itself. For firstly, all around,
Above, below, on each side, there's no bound
Within the universe. As I have taught,
Truth of itself cries out and light is brought
By the nature of the deep. Since every place
In all directions holds a boundless space
And countless seeds fly round eternally,
We cannot say that in reality
More things weren't made beside the sky and earth,
And Nature's passive: for Nature gave birth
To the world, and seeds by chance regardlessly
In many ways collide erratically
Till things now linked could be in every case
The start of many mighty things – the race
Of creatures, earth, sea, sky. So I profess
Interminably that you must confess
That other groups of matter live elsewhere,
Like this that's clasped voraciously by air.
And when abundant matter is in place,
Moreover, and before it all there's space,
Then things must be achieved assuredly
If nothing hinders them, and, should there be
As many seeds as all of time can tell
Existed and the same nature as well

Abided with its old ability
To throw all seeds together similarly
As they have now been thrown, then you are bound
To say that other worlds may yet be found
With men and creatures of a different kind.
So in that sum there's nothing you can find
Which is unique. Take creatures – it is so
With them as with the breed of men: also
With fish and birds, and therefore with the sea,
Sky, earth, sun, moon – in actuality
All that exists, and they are not unique
But numberless; their life will reach a peak,
And they're as mortal as each entity
On earth which holds a multiplicity
Of similar things. Convinced thus, you will find
Nature is free at once, quite unconfined,
Rid of proud masters, of her own accord
Acting alone without one heavenly lord
Assisting her, for to the gods I pray,
Who live in tranquil peace each perfect day.
Who rule the sum of all that has no bound
And at one time turn all the heavens around
And through the fruitful world give warmth to us
With endless fire, ever ubiquitous,
To make the sky obscure with clouds and shake
Their thunder in the heavens and often make
Their shrines with lightning fall and move away
Into the wilds to cast a bolt to slay

The innocent and undeserving, though
They turn a blind eye to the guilty? So,
Ever since the world was first begun,
When first one saw the earth and sea and sun,
Many bodies have been added from without
And many seeds assembled round about,
And all of these were tossed together by
The mighty All that sea and land and sky
Might grow. All bodies are sent out by blows
From everywhere, each to its own, and goes
Back to its kind. Thus liquid must give birth
To liquid, earth engenders yet more earth,
Fires forge out fires, air air, till finally
Nature brings all things with dexterity
To a conclusion: thus the arteries
Of life do not receive more entities
Than flow out and come back. Then life must be
At a standstill, and with her mastery
Nature curbs growth. For those things we behold
Merrily growing as they take a hold
Of the ladder that will take them gradually
Up to the summit of maturity
Take on more bodies than they liberate
As long as they're able to accommodate
Food through the veins and things that aren't so spread
As to disperse too much on which they're fed.
Many elements flow away, we must believe,
And leave, and yet the bodies must receive

More till they've reached the pinnacle of growth.
Then by minute degrees age fractures both
Vigour and strength and it is liquefied
Into decay. The more immense and wide
A thing's become when it has ceased to grow,
The more atoms it scatters and lets go
From every side and food can't easily
Enter the veins. Since so abundantly
It streams things out, fewer things are supplied,
And that makes sense, for they are rarefied
From all the flowing out once they were dead,
Knocked down, since through old age they're barely fed.
There's nought that bodies buffet from without
That they do not as well break up and clout
With fatal blows. The world will crumble, too,
For nourishment must patch up and renew,
Supporting and sustaining – but in vain
Because the bodies' veins do not contain
Enough – what's needed Nature won't allow.
The power of life is broken even now:
The earth, worn out and drained, can scarce beget
Much more than tiny animals, and yet
Large beasts once lived. There was no mortal race,
As I believe, sent down here from the face
Of heaven on some gold chain that they might dwell
Upon the fields. They're from no sea, no swell
Of crashing waves against the rocks – they came
From earth, where they're still bred, the very same

That bred them then. Besides, it was for us
She first made grain and vines luxurious
And splendid pasturage, which we can't see
Will be augmented with our industry.
Our farmers are exhausted, as indeed
Our oxen are, our pastures barely feed
Our families and our ploughshares all are worn.
To stretch our toil, the fields hold back their corn.
And now the ancient farmer frequently
Will shake his head that all his industry
Has come to nothing: seeking to contrast
His present situation with the past,
His father's fortunes he consistently
Extols; the present age continually
The sower of the shrivelled vine will groan
About and the old world with many a moan
He'll grumble was so full of piety
And in a small domain would easily
Support his life, although his share of land
Was smaller then; and he can't understand
That everything in steps breaks and decays,
Surmounted by the ancient lapse of days.

BOOK III

You, who amid such darkness raised a light
So clear and made the gifts of life so bright,
I follow, glory of the human race,
And on the marks that you have left, I place
My feet, not so much wishing to compete
But, out of love, hankering to repeat
Your thoughts: indeed how could a swallow vie
With swans? How could a young goat even try
With trembling limbs to run against a steed?
Our father, truth-discoverer, you feed
Us with your precepts, and from what you wrote,
As bees in every flowery glade will gloat
On honey, we take golden nourishment
Deserving of a life that's permanent,
Illustrious man. For once your reasoning
Starts to proclaim the nature of everything,
The terrors of the mind all flee away,
The world's walls open out and an array
Of actions in the void I then can see:
The gods appear in all their majesty
As do their peaceful homes unshaken by
The winds and rain-clouds sprinkling from on high,
Unmarred by frost and snow, and ever bright,
The air surrounds them, laughing with delight.
By Nature everything has been endowed
And at no time there's nothing that will cloud
Their peace of mind. And yet, contrarily,

No Acherousian temples do they see;
And yet the earth's no check to everything
That's visible, whatever's happening
Throughout the world beneath us; and when I
Then gaze upon these things, I'm captured by
A sort of holy joy, but also dread
Since Nature manifestly has been spread
By you in every part so openly.
And since I've shown the great variety
Of origins of every living thing,
The difference in their shape, how varying
They are and how they of their own accord
In everlasting motion fly abroad,
Creating everything, I must make clear
How mind and spirit work and oust the fear
Of Hell, which troubles man with thoughts of death
And darkness, leaving him with not a breath
Of clean and pure delight. When men proclaim
That bodily illness and a life of shame
Frightens men more than Hell and that the mind
Is blood or even air, if they're inclined
That way, and that they have no need to hear
Our reasoning, my words will make it clear
That they are merely supercilious,
Not facing facts. They're driven far from us,
Disgraced and suffering many miseries,
And yet they still perform their obsequies
To their ancestors, wherever they've fled,

And slay black cattle, offering to the dead
Their sacrifices, with more eagerness
Reverting to religion. It's no less
Of use to scrutinize a man attacked
By peril and to comprehend in fact
The kind of man he might turn out to be;
For only then will he speak verity
Elicited from his very heart and soul:
The mask's torn off, the truth remaining whole.
Greed and ambition, which drive men to spurn
The law and sometimes be prepared to burn
The midnight oil to reach the very height
Of power are instruments which feed their fright
Of death. Contempt and need are seen to be
Far from delight and the stability
Of life; before the gates of death they stray,
It seems, whence men desire to flee away:
Spurred by false hope, with civil blood they heap
Up riches after riches as they keep
On slaughtering, rejoicing cruelly
Upon a brother's death, while enmity
And fear possesses them at the appeal
Of a kinsman who invites them to a meal.
They envy him his influence as well
Since everyone perceives him as a swell,
While they themselves complain that they are stuck
With wallowing in obscurity and muck.
Some sweat and toil just for an effigy

And a name. It happens, too, that frequently
That fear of death develops as a hate
Of life and in their grief they fabricate
Their own demise because they don't recall
That this fear was the origin of all
Their miseries, because this fear can make
This man to lose his honour, that to break
His bond and all to topple piety.
For often one betrays his family
Or country while he's trying to evade
The land below. As children are afraid
Of darkness, sometimes we're afraid of light
More than those things that children in the night
Fear will appear. And therefore this dark fright
Must be dispersed but not by shafts of light
Nor the sun's rays but by the stern decree
Of Nature. I must say primarily
Intelligence, more normally called the mind,
Where wisdom and control of life you'll find,
Is no less part of the human frame than eyes
Or hands or feet or other things that comprise
One's being. But there are some men who say
The feeling of the mind will never stay
In one fixed place but that it's meant to be
The vital force the Greeks call 'harmony' -
It gives us sense, though perspicaciousness
Is nowhere to be found, as healthiness,
Though said to be within us, does not dwell

In any part of someone who is well.
But I imagine that in what they say
Of this they wander very far astray.
There's an unhealthy man before our face,
Though he is happy in some hidden place;
The opposite's often true, though, when we find
A man whose body's fit, though not his mind,
As when a man whose foot aches feels no pain
Meanwhile within his head. And yet again,
In heavy sleep where there is no sensation
There's something yet that's feeling agitation
In joys and empty cares. Our spirit lies
Within our frame, which does not realize
Feeling through harmony - when a great part
Of a body is removed, still at the heart
There's life; but then again, when just a few
Particles of heat desert the frame and through
The mouth the air's thrust out, immediately
That same life will desert each artery
And bone, and by this you may recognize
Each particle differently fortifies
One's life, and wind and heat provide the seeds
To cater to it, seeing to its needs.
And it's the seeds of wind and heat that see
That life still lingers on. Accordingly
They quit the frame at death. Therefore we find
The nature and the spirit of the mind
Are part of man, so call them harmony,

Brought down from lofty Helicon to be
Used by musicians, or perhaps they drew
It from another source and gave it to
Something that lacked a name. So anyway,
It's theirs! Now hear what else I have to say:
I say the mind and spirit are both bound
And interlocked together and compound
One nature, but the head is lord of all
And it is understood that we now call
It mind and wit, which in the breast is placed,
Where throbbing terror, fear and joy are based:
There, then, are mind and wit. Dispersed around
The frame, the rest of the spirit may be found,
Obeying both. It has the faculty
Of sense when nothing simultaneously
Affects the frame and soul. As when the head
Or eye is aching, torment is not spread
Elsewhere, sometimes the mind is injured too,
Though glad when the other parts of the spirit do
No harm. But when the wit is stirred by dread
We see the total spirit now will spread
Throughout the frame, which turns a pallid grey
And sweats, the voice falters and dies away,
The eyes grow dim, there is a buzzing sound
Inside the ears, the limbs fall to the ground,
And thus the mind and spirit we may see
Are unified, and when the energy
Of mind attacks the spirit, straightaway

It buffets it and sends it on its way
Towards the body. Therefore we may see
The nature of both things is bodily:
It drives our limbs, it rouses us from sleep,
It changes our expressions, thus to sweep
Us onward, which cannot occur without
Touching, and furthermore there is no doubt
That touch needs body – thus we must agree
The nature of them both is bodily.
The mind, then, can experience as well
The feelings that within our bodies dwell.
If bones and sinews are divided by
A grim sword but the victim does not die,
Languor occurs, and then a blissful swoon,
But then he feels a turmoil very soon
And sometimes an uncertain urge to rise.
Thus by these precepts you must realize
The mind's corporeal, because it knows
What it must feel when buffeted by blows
And bodily weapons. Now I'll say what kind
Of body is implanted in the mind
And how it's formed. It is exceedingly
Delicate and made of remarkably
Minute atoms. So try to realize
That nothing that appears before our eyes
Moves faster than the mind. It has been found
Therefore that all its seeds must then be round
And tiny, so that a small energy

May move and touch it. All Liquidity
Is moved thus since it's made of shapes that flow
And are but tiny. Honey's nature, though,
Is more deep-rooted, flowing tardily
Because its stock cleaves more compressedly,
Its atoms not so smooth or fine or round.
Indeed the gentle breeze, we all have found,
Can blow high heaps of poppy-seed way.
And yet, contrariwise, we cannot say
That stones or wheat-ears can do this at all.
So, insofar as entities are small
And even, so is their mobility;
A thing more rough and heavy proves to be
More rigid. Since the nature of the mind
Is movable, it must be confined
To tiny, smooth, round seeds. You, best of friends,
Will find these things will pay you dividends
Elsewhere. It's delicate and it can place
Itself into a very tiny space
If once compacted. When death's tranquil peace
Gets hold of man and mind and soul both cease
To be, you'll see no form or weight remains
Inside the total frame. Everyone gains
All things from death excepting warming breath
And vital sense, both carried off by death.
Twined in the vital organs thus the soul
Requires the tiniest seeds. For when the whole
Body is gone, the limbs' contours must stay

Uninjured and no weight must slip away.
In the same way, when we have lost the scent
Of Bacchus' gift or some emollient
Has shed its perfume or a savour's gone
From someone's body, yet it lingers on
Before our eyes, its heaviness intact –
This is no marvel, for the seeds in fact,
So many and minute, produce the smell
And redolence which in the body dwell.
Yet Nature's not that simple, you must learn –
An aura, mixed with heat, will in its turn
Desert the dying, and the heat will drain
The air away, for heat cannot remain
When lacking air. The nature of heat is rare
And therefore through it many seeds of air
Must move. This triple nature of the mind
Cannot engender sense of any kind
Or thoughts or motions. Therefore there must be
An added fourth, which has been totally
Denied a name: nothing's more animated
Or more impalpable or more created
So even and so rounded and so small:
It gave sense-bearing motions to us all.
Composed of little shapes, it stimulated
The first; the motions were appropriated
By heat and wind, then air, and finally
The blood is struck and every entity
Begins to feel and now there is sensation

Within the marrow – joy or irritation.
And pain will not for nothing penetrate
The frame but all will at a certain rate
Begin to be discomfited and flee
The frame hither and yon. But usually
It's on the skin motions come to an end
And that's the reason why we can extend
Our life. I'm keen to tell you how they're blent
And with what combinations they are meant
To function, but I lack the words to tell
You this, but I will persevere as well
As I am able briefly. For there's none
That can be sundered from another one:
They act as one, though many. We know well
All creatures have a savour and a smell
And warmth, but one great bulk is made intact
From these: for wind and warmth and air all act
As one to make one nature, and that great
And mobile energy will then create
Sense-bearing motions throughout the insides,
Because this essence in our body hides,
More deeply than all else, soul of the soul
Itself, throughout our members and our whole
Body: the energy of soul and mind
Is mixed and latent, for it is combined
Of bodies small and few and thus created,
By which the body has been dominated.
And by this reason wind and heat and air

Must act thus, each one taking on its share
Of rule, and thus one nature has been made
Lest by disseverment the sense should fade
Because of them. The mind will seethe with spleen
When struck by heat, and then the eyes are seen
To flash with fire; cold wind, that friend of dread,
Will through the shaken frame arouse and spread
A shudder, while a gentle air will grace
A breast with peace and make a tranquil face.
But those with restive hearts are hotter yet,
Possessing minds of passion quickly set
In rage, of which lions primarily
Are seen, often displaying thunderously
Their fierceness, quite unable to withhold
Their anger, while the mind of stags is cold
And windier – those icy currents make
Their innards cold while all their members quake.
The oxen, though, live by the tranquil air,
Nor does the torch of wrath cause them to flare;
Not pierced by icy javelins of fear,
They don't grow stiff – halfway between the deer
And lions thus they're placed. Thus, too, the nation
Of men – though they're refined by education,
Yet it has left those pristine marks behind
That represent the nature of each mind.
And evil can't be, it must be supposed,
So purged from them that one is not disposed
To tempers, while another easily

Is touched by terror, while a third may be
More mild. The traits and natures of mankind
Must differ very much, but I can't find
A name for the shape of each prime entity
Or whence has come this great variety
Nor treat the hidden causes, but I can
Say this; these marks which show the traits of man,
Which reason won't take from us, are so small
That nothing can't prevent a man at all
From living like the gods above. Therefore
This soul is kept within the body's core
As guardian; with common roots they cleave
Together and cannot, unless they leave
This world, be torn apart. One can't with ease
Tear off the fragrance from small quantities
Of frankincense unless the body dies –
The nature of the mind and soul likewise:
Their seeds have been from birth so intertwined
While with a partner they have been combined;
If it should lack its partner's faculty,
The other would possess no energy
Or feel; our sense, though, is intensified
By mutual motions placed on either side.
Besides, alone the body's not begotten
Nor grows nor after death is nought but rotten.
Though water sometimes gives off heat whereby
We gain advantage, yet it does not die,
Remaining safe; it is not in this way

Our limbs, deserted quite, can bear, I say,
That they have lost the soul, but they must die,
All mutilated, and then putrefy.
From early days, by joint communication,
The soul and body gain an education
In vital motions; even when they're still
Within the womb, they'll not, unless by ill
And pestilence, be harmed; so you may see
That, as the source of their security
Is linked, so must its nature be as well.
Moreover, if somebody dared to tell
You that the body does not have sensation,
Opining that the soul, in combination
With body, takes on motion which we call
'Sense', he is clearly battling with all
The proven facts, for it would be in vain.
For who is there who's able to explain
The feelings of the body unless he
Has learned what we've been told of openly?
"But when the soul has gone, the frame's bereft
Of sense." Indeed! For when the soul has left,
It loses what it never owned at all,
And more besides, after soul's downfall.
To say the eyes see nothing and yet through
The same the mind can see is hard to do.
For sense itself forces our eyes to be
Aware of consciousness, especially
When we can't see things that are very bright

Because our eyes are hampered by the light.
With doors this is not true – with eyes we see,
So doors don't undertake the drudgery.
If eyes should act as doors, I would declare
That, with our sight removed, our mind would fare
Yet better at seeing what they would survey
When even the door-posts had been cleared away.
Don't take up what the sage Democritus
Has in this discipline laid down for us,
That prime germs of the body and the mind,
Each super-imposed on each, all weave and wind
Our members. For the elements of the soul
Are smaller far than those which form the whole
Outer and inner body. Also they
Are less in number as they sparsely stray
Throughout our frame. And so it may be seen
That all the soul's prime germs maintain between
Themselves large intervals, though in contrast
There are the smallest bodies which are cast
Against us, rousing motions which have sense
That they apply within our bodies. Hence
We sometimes cringe to see the dust alight
On us, or chalk or vapours of the night
Or spiders' webs which, while we're travelling,
Drop down, their withered strands entangling
About our head or feathers that alight
On us or plant-seeds, which, being so slight,
Seem barely to descend: each crawling thing

We do not feel nor traces settling
Upon us made by midges and their kin.
Thus many prime germs must be stirred within
Ourselves once the soul's seeds that through our frame
Are mixed begin to realize that those same
Prime germs have been attacked and then pulsate
Between the gaps and clash and integrate,
Then leap apart. The mind, though, we may say,
Is keeper of the gates and holds more sway
Over the soul. Sans intellect and mind,
No part of any soul can ever find
Rest in our frame, because it flies away
And thus the icy limbs must ever stay
In death's cold grip. However, he whose mind
And intellect have both remained behind
Lives on. Although he may be mutilated
And from the limbs the soul's been extricated,
He breathes the life-sustaining air, and when
Most of the soul has vanished, even then
He lingers on, as in an injured eye
The pupil is unharmed and does not die,
The sight still strong: but do not harm the ball
That forms the eye but make incisions all
Around the pupil, leaving it behind,
For vision will be ruined, you will find,
If more is done. But if that tiny piece,
The centre, is destroyed, the eye will cease
To function, though elsewhere the ball, you'll find,

Is clear. And thus it is that soul and mind
Are linked forevermore. Now I shall tell
You that the minds and souls of all that dwell
On earth are born and die, and in my verse,
Written with lyric toil, I will rehearse
My rule of life for you, but I shall frame
The two of them in but one single name;
Thus when I speak of soul while telling you
That it is mortal, think that I speak, too,
Of mind, since they're the same, concatenated
Together. Now I have communicated
To you that soul is subtle, a compound
Of tiny particles, and you have found
Its parts much smaller in capacity
Than water, fog or smoke, mobility
Being therefore more functional by far,
So they're more prone to move, although they are
Struck by less cause: they're moved apparently
By images of smoke and fog, as we,
When we're asleep, see shrines exhaling steam
And smoke, for there's no doubt that as you dream
These images come to you from afar.
Therefore when you discern, when pitchers are
Demolished, all the water flows away:
The fog and smoke will also in this way
Depart – therefore believe the soul also
Is shed abroad and will more quickly go,
Then be destroyed, dissolving once again

Back into its own fundamentals, when
It leaves the body; if that body's split,
Just like the jar I've spoken of, and it,
By loss of blood, has now been rarefied
And can no longer hold the soul inside.
How could you think that stuff that is more rare
Than bodies can be held by any air?
Besides, along with body mind we hold
Is born and with it grows up and grows old.
When little children totter all around
With weakling frames, a weaking wisdom's found
Within them: with the years their powers grow
With understanding as they come to know
More things, but then, as they grow old, they find
That with a shattered body they're defined
By feebleness, the mind itself gives way,
Thought hobbles and the tongue begins to stray;
At the same time one fails and loses all.
It makes sense likewise that the soul will fall
Apart, dissolving high into the air;
And we have seen the body come to fare
In the same way. The body, it is plain,
Has dread diseases and appalling pain –
So mind feels grief and fear and bitter care,
Wherefore the mind, as we must be aware,
Will taste of death, for it will frequently
Wander around a body's malady,
Beside itself, crazily babbling,

And often sinking, eyelids languishing,
Head nodding, till in endless sleep it lies,
Where it's unable now to recognize
Those who stand round about it, cheeks bedight
With tears, and vainly calling it to the light
Once more. That mind dissolves, therefore, we need
To say, since grief and illness both may lead
To death, as we well know. A strong wine's force
Enters a man and scattered fires course
Around his veins, then comes a lethargy
Within his limbs as he precariously
Staggers about, his mind awash, his speech
Sluggish, and one can hear him brawl and screech,
Eyes all aswim and all else that ensues.
Why is this? Well, it happens when strong booze
Perturbs the soul. If a thing more vigorous
Got in, therefore, it would be poisonous
And kill the soul. It happens frequently
That someone has a seizure suddenly,
As from a lightning-bolt, before our eyes –
He falls down, foaming, and, as there he lies,
Groans, shakes, talks nonsense as he twists about,
His gasps in fits and starts, and he wears out
His limbs. These ills disturb the soul as well,
As winds disturb the salt sea's billowing swell.
A groan's forced out because his misery
Has gripped his limbs: however, generally
The voice's seeds are driven outwards through

The mouth as they are always wont to do.
He’s made inane, because, as I have shown,
The energy of mind and soul are thrown
Apart by the same pestilence, although
When the cause of the disease turns back to go
Into its shadowy lairs, the man will rise,
Though reeling, and will come to recognize
His senses slowly, and his soul he’ll find,
Because within his body soul and mind
Are shaken by diseases and distraught
By labour. Wherefore, then, should it be thought
That in the open air they both can spend
A bodiless life which promises no end,
In battle with the winds? Ans since we see
That for the sick mind there is remedy,
As for the body, this must clearly show
Mortality is in the mind also.
For he who aims to modulate the mind
Or change a single thing of any kind
Should add new parts or redress the array
Or from the total take something away;
But what’s immortal does not wish to be
Increased or rearranged, no entity
Removed from it, since change of anything
Beyond its boundaries ends in the sting
Of death: therefore, whether the mind is ill
Or else restored by medicine, it still
Gives notice of its own mortality,

As I have taught. Such is veracity,
Opposed to other theories, sheltering
From refuge all those adversaries who bring
Two-edged rebuttals. Someone we may see
Who loses vital senses gradually –
First toes, then nails, then feet, then legs turn blue
And fail, then all his other members, too,
Show signs of frigid death, and, since the soul
Is split and can't at any time be whole
Alone, it must then have mortality.
But if perhaps your rationality
Claims that it can bring all the parts inside
The frame so that sensation can abide
Throughout, where much of the soul exists, it ought
To have more more feeling but, as I have taught,
A place like this does not exist, and thus
The soul is torn apart – that's obvious.
Dispersed outside, it dies. Do not suppose
The soul survives inside the frames of those
Who slowly die – the soul, one has to say,
Is mortal, should it fly, dispersed, away
Or shrink as it becomes stationary –
The more a man lacks sensitivity
The less is life within him. For the mind
Of man is just one part which you may find
In one fixed place, just like the ears and eyes
And other senses, which all supervise
Man's life; as eyes and hands, when cut apart

From us, can’t feel at all or even start
To be but quickly rot, similarly
The mind without the man can never be,
Because the man and body both contain
The mind (or you, perhaps, to make it plain
May use another metaphor), the mind
And body being so closely entwined.
Together they thrive. The mind alone, without
The frame, cannot send vital motions out,
Nor can the body, wanting soul, endure
And use the senses. And you may be sure
The eye, uprooted from the face, can’t see
A blessed thing, and so, similarly
The soul and mind, it seems, when they’re alone,
Possess no actual power of their own,
Mixed in with veins, guts, bones and ligaments,
Possessing, too, primordial elements
Which through great spaces cannot leap apart,
One from another, thus able to start
Life-motions which, after a body’s dead,
They could not do because they then have sped
Outside the body, thus no longer bound.
For air will be a body, breathing, sound,
If the soul can hold itself within the air,
Enclosing all the motions living there,
Which in the frame itself it used to do.
Once more, therefore, we must say that it’s true
That once the body’s opened and its breath

Spills out, the senses of the mind meet death,
The soul as well, since they are spliced together.
And once again, since body cannot weather
The split between them both without decay
And loathsome stench, then we would have to say
That from deep down the soul has been dispersed
Like smoke, the body totally immersed
In dissolution: every deep foundation
Within it has been moved, leaving its station,
The soul through every body's winding way
And orifice out-filtering away.
By many means, then, you are free to know
The nature of the soul – that it must go
In fragments from the body and is rent
In tatters even before it then is sent
To float away into the windy tide.
Often, when life yet lingers on inside
The frame, the souls seems anxious to be free
And quit the body's confines totally,
By something agitated, and, as though
The soul is close at hand, its features go
Inert, the bloodless limbs hang down (the kind
Of case when one says, "He's out of his mind"
Or "He's quite gone", while others stand and quake
With trepidation, anxious now to make
The best of all the days that yet remain
To them before life cuts away her chain).
For then the mind and soul are shaken so

As with the frame itself they, tottering, go,
Near death. Thus, with its wrappings stripped away,
Why would you doubt the soul could ever stay
The course, so weakened, for eternity,
More likely to dissolve immediately?
Nobody feels his soul leave, as he dies,
All in one piece, nor does he feel it rise
Up to his throat and jaws, but rather he
Can sense it fail in one locality
That's fixed, as he is very well aware
That all his other senses founder where
They yet remain. If our souls truly were
Immortal, then they would not so demur,
At death, to be dispersed but they would take
Their leaving as release and, like a snake,
Throw off their garb. Again, why is it so
That our intelligence and minds don't grow
From head or feet or hands but that they cling
To one fixed place, unless for everything
One place has been assigned that it may stay
Unharmed, all limbs set in the same array?
One thing's born of another – flames, therefore,
Are not created out of streams, nor more
Likely comes cold from fire. Plus, if we
Affirm a soul has immortality
And, even when disjointed from our frame,
Able to feel, I fancy we may claim
They have five senses, for there is no way

But this that we may picture that they stray
In Hell. Painters and bards of days gone by
Have seen them thus. No nose or hand or eye
Includes a soul while bodiless: it's clear
That this is so for any tongue or ear
As well. Alone, then, they can't feel or be.
And since it is a vital sense we see
In the whole body, if a sudden blow
Should strike it with a mighty force and go
Clean through it, then the soul without a doubt
Would be divided , too, and flung far out
Along with body. But whatever's cleft
In many parts admits that it's bereft
Of an eternal nature. For they say
Scythe-bearing chariots so swiftly slay
The foe that as their limbs lie on the ground,
Dissevered from the trunk, they have been found
To quiver, while their owner feels no pain
Due to the blow's speed, but he roams the plain
To carry on the slaughter, unaware
His shield and left arm are no longer there,
Snatched by the scythes the steeds have dragged away.
Another struggles to renew the fray,
Blind to his lost right arm. Another tries,
One of his legs now lost, again to rise,
While on the dying foot the toes are spread,
Twitching. When lopped away, even the head
Retains a look of life, eyes open wide,

Until the remnants of the soul have died.
If, when a snake lashes its tail and darts
Its tongue, you sever it in many parts,
You'll see each part begin to writhe around
With its new wound and spatter up the ground
With gore, its fore-part turning back to strain
Its jaws that it might bite away the pain.
Does each part hold a soul? But if that's so,
That self-same reasoning would surely show
Each beast has many souls. There's one alone,
However, which has now been overthrown
Along with body. So mortality
Belongs to both and each of them can be
Cut into many parts. If one can say
The soul's immortal as it winds its way
Into a child that's newly born, then why
Can't we remember things from days gone by
Before our birth? But if the faculty
Of mind has changed so much that memory
Has failed, that's just like death, I think. Therefore
That death has come to what once lived before
And what is living now has been created
Anew. If, once the frame's been generated,
The powers of the mind are introduced
Just at the moment when we are produced,
It should not with the limbs and body grow,
Or even in the body's bloodstream. No,
It ought to live alone within a cell

(Yet all the body throngs with sense as well).
Souls must have origins, we must agree,
Nor ever be immune from Death's decree.
We must not think something's so closely tied
Up with our frames if it has slipped inside:
The facts we know, though, prove the opposite,
For soul throughout the veins is such a fit,
As well as through the sinews and the skin
And all the bones, that even the teeth share in
Sensation as in toothaches we may see
And ice and when one bites down suddenly
On a stone in bread. Since souls are so combined
With all those bodily parts, they cannot find
A means to save themselves and steal away
From nerves and bones and joints. But should you say
A soul enters a body from outside,
It is more prone to die since it's allied
So closely with the flesh; what usually
Enters dissolves and dies accordingly.
It permeates the frame, as nourishment,
Which, once throughout the limbs and frame it's sent,
Dissolves but yields up something new. And so
The spirit and the mind, although they go
Into a new whole body, even as they
Seep into it, yet are dissolved away.
The particles that make the mind, those same
That exercise dominion in the frame,
Rose up out of the mind that permeated

The flesh and at its time deteriorated
And died. Therefore it seems that we may say
That there's a natal and a funeral day
For the spirit. Are its seeds, then, left behind
Or not? If they are not, we'll have to find
Them mortal for they are diminished by
The parts they've lost: however, if they fly
Away with all their parts completely sound,
Why is that the rotting flesh is found
Disgorging worms, and wherefore do we see
A boneless, bloodless multiplicity
Of living things that teem and crawl about
The bloated corpse? But if perhaps you doubt
All this and think that souls can seep inside
Each worm and don't reflect how such a tide
Of living things assembled in one spot
Whence only one crept out, should you then not
Consider whether souls actually chase
Small worms' seeds and therefrom erect a place
To make a home or if they rather find
A ready-made home? But why this toil and grind?
It's hard to say. They're bodiless, and thus
They flutter round, in no way tremulous
Nor pained by hunger, cold or any blight;
But rather it's the body that must fight
Against these flaws of life, as must the mind
Since with the body It has been combined.
Though it is useful for those souls to make

A bodily home, it’s still a big mistake –
They can’t and therefore don’t. There is no way,
Moreover, that these souls can make their stay
In ready-made bodies, for if that were so
They could not forge the subtle to and fro
Of feeling. Why has violence been bred
In brooding lions? Why do deer feel dread,
Subject to flight? And why are foxes sly?
And speaking of all other creatures, why
Are they at birth endowed with qualities
If not since mind, with all its faculties,
Proliferates with its own seed and kind
Along with the whole frame? But were the mind
Immortal, able, too, to change around
Its bodies, earthly creatures would be found
Confused in nature – savage hounds would fly
From deer, a hawk would tremble, frightened by
A dove’s approach, wisdom would fail mankind,
Fierce creatures would be wise. If you’d a mind
To think soul, blessed by immortality,
Mutates along with body, you would be
Quite wrong, for what is changed will melt away
And die, since parts are moved and their array
Is altered; they must melt away as well
And die with body. There are those who tell
That always will the souls of mankind fly
To human frames to make their homes, but I
Will ask: How can a stupid soul arise

And be created from a soul that's wise?
Why does a child's soul have no commonsense?
And why can foals not leap a lofty fence
As sturdy steeds can do? They'll try to claim
That mind becomes a weakling in a frame
That's weak. That being so, though, nonetheless
It's necessary, too, that they confess
The soul is mortal, since it thoroughly
Changes and dies, the sense it previously
Possessed now gone. Or how can mind grow strong
And gain the flower of life it craves along
With body unless it had always been
Its consort from the start? What would it mean
To leave on ancient limbs? Did it fear to stay
Inside a putrid corpse or feel dismay
His house, exhausted with longevity,
Would tumble down? There is no jeopardy
For what's immortal. And, as wild beasts mate,
It's daft to think immortal souls would wait
To see what bodies they might occupy,
A countless number of them, piled up high,
Contending to be first – unless maybe
There is among the souls a strict decree
Allowing just the first to reach its home.
No trees live in the air, and in the foam
Of ocean are no clouds, nor in the ground
Can fishes live, while blood cannot be found
In wood, nor sap in stones: each entity

Will grow in its own fixed locality.
Without the body, then, the nature of mind
Can rise alone, nor will we ever find
It far from blood and sinews. If it could,
However, rise alone, you rather should
Find it in heads or shoulders or the base
Of the feet, or born in any other place,
Although within the self-same human frame
It yet abides, residing in the same
Vessel. But since within that frame we find
A fixed and separate place wherein the mind
And soul may grow, so all the more we should
Say that outside the frame they never could
Be born and then survive. When the frame dies,
It's necessary that the soul likewise
Will perish since within it it's embedded.
For if you claim the mortal has been wedded
To the immortal, thinking they agree
Together, that's a gross absurdity.
For what's more stupid and incongruous
Than thinking that they are harmonious
As they together weather every squall?
For everything eternal must block all
And every stroke, since they are strong and stout
And must be able also to keep out
Whatever powers that might lacerate
Their well-fixed parts (as I have said of late,
Seeds are like that); or through eternity

They’re able to survive since they are free
Of blows, just like the void, which remains sound,
Or else because there is no room around
Them all that they may fly off and disperse,
Just like that sum of sums, the universe:
There is no place beyond whither things might
Asunder fly and nothing that can smite
Them with great blows. But if you should decide
The soul’s immortal, mainly since it’s tied
Securely by dynamic forces, never
Assailed by any danger, or, if ever
They were, those dreadful threats would fly away,
Repelled ere we could feel the harm that they
Might do, [it has been found this is not true].
For when the body’s sick, the soul is too,
Often distressed by what’s not happened yet,
Beset by dread and wearying with fret,
And even by transgressions formerly
Committed it is gnawed at bitterly.
Add madness, also, and forgetfulness
That drowns in murky waves of sluggishness.
Death’s nothing to us since forevermore
It will be mortal: as in times before
Our birth we felt no ill, when all around
The Carthaginians with their battle-sound
Assailed us, and the whole world trembled so
With war which under heaven’s vaults brought woe
And in the balance stood the victory,

As mankind held its breath on land and sea,
When we're no more and there arrives a breach
Of soul and body, by the work of each
Of which into one state we are combined,
We'll have no more experiences, blind
To everything, not even if the sea
Mingled with earth and there were unity
In sea and heaven. But if we could say
That, after they had both been stripped away
From body, mind and soul still had sensation,
What would it be for us, a combination
Of flesh and soul? Even if after death
We were remade, rewarded with the breath
And light of life, it would mean nought at all
After the interruption of recall.
We'd not be as we were in former days
And feel no more distress. For when you gaze
On all the years gone by and think about
How many motions matter can send out,
You'd well believe the seeds from which we grow
Have the same order just as long ago,
Though this we can't remember, since we've found
A break in life's been made, and all around
Have motions wandered from our faculties.
For if one is expecting maladies,
At the same time he must be present too.
Death won't allow these ills that may seem due
To fall on him. Thus not in any way

Should we fear death, nor should there be dismay
For him who's dead, because, once he's no more,
Why should he care if he was born before?
When you observe a man who is distressed
Because his corpse will rot once laid to rest
Or he will die in flames or in the jaws
Of wild beasts, know that this should give you pause –
The note sounds false, for in his heart there lies
An unseen sting, however he denies
That there's no feeling after he is dead,
Because he contradicts what he has said:
He won't uproot himself and cast away
His erstwhile self but thinks something must stay
Within him. Picturing himself deceased,
His body torn by vultures or some beast,
A man weeps for his state, his fantasy
Still substituting for reality.
He grieves that he is mortal, for he spies
No second self that's placed in his demise
To grieve his own self's passing now he's fated
To lie there, burned by flame or lacerated.
But if it's evil to be mangled by
The jaws of brutal beasts, I don't see why
It pains you less if flames incinerate
Your body or if you should suffocate
On honey or lie on an icy rock,
Stone-cold, or be the victim of the shock
Of earth piled on you. "Now no loving spouse,"

They say, “shall greet you in your happy house,
No little ones will run to you to snatch
A kiss, a silent happiness to catch
Your heart. No longer will you oversee
Your business or protect your family.
So many joys of life in one vile day
Are taken from you.” But they do not say
As well, “Your yearning for them, too, has fled.”
Had they considered this and further said
Some words on this, you would be free of fear
And anguish. “Even as you’re lying here,
Asleep in death, you also shall be free
Of all your future griefs and misery.
But we have wept insatiably beside
Your ashes: never will our grief subside.”
But we must ask the cause of bitterness
When what is mourned reclines in quietness.
Why grieve forever? Guests will raise a glass,
Their temples wreathed, and say, “How soon they pass –
Those golden days we never can redeem!”
The feelings of those people, it would seem,
Are that in death the greatest ill would be
A ravenous thirst that leads to misery
Or else another craving. For in fact,
When mind and body are at rest, intact,
No-one rues death; indeed this sleep could last
Forever, since we don’t yearn for the past,
For those primordial germs don’t go astray

And from sense-giving motions move away
Too far, since when a man is suddenly
Jolted from sleep, he makes a recovery.
Thus death means much less to us, if that less
Stands for that which we see as nothingness.
For germs diffuse more widely at one's death,
For none will rise again or take one breath
At life's chill pause. If Nature suddenly
Upbraided us: "Why this anxiety,
Mortals, these weak complaints? Why do you weep
At death? For if your goods you did not heap
In piles so that they leaked, as in a sieve,
And if before your death you got to live
A pleasant life, why do you not then play
The guest who after dining, goes away
Content, you fool? Go, seek eternal rest!
But if you waste that with which you were blessed
And life offends you, why would you then try
To add more ills than in the days gone by?
No, rather end your life of drudgery!
For nought can I devise of gaiety
For you. For everything is just the same
Forever. Even with your wrinkled frame
And weak limbs nothing changes. Should you go
On to the end of time – yes, even though
You live forever –" what do we reply?
That Nature keeps the law and does not lie.
But should a man riper in years bewail

His death more than is fit, should she not rail
At him: “Cease weeping, fool, cease whining, too:
You’re wrinkled, but your life has favoured you;
You crave what’s absent, scorning what is present,
So your unfulfilled life’s not been too pleasant.
Now ere you guessed it death stands at your side
Before you can depart quite satisfied.
But what’s unseemly for your greying hair
Cast off! Make room for others? That is fair!”?
That she should reprimand you is her due –
The old concedes when pushed out by the new,
Since one thing heals another, and no-one
Is sent to Tartarus’ dominion:
The future generation needs to grow
With new material; these, too, will go,
Their life completed, even as before
Went others, for eternal is the score
Of generations. One may merely rent
One’s life, not own it. All those lives that went
Before our birth mean nothing to us. Thus
A mirror is by Nature shown to us
Of what lies In the future when we’re dead.
Does any of it fill our hearts with dread?
Is it not more agreeable than sleep?
Indeed, whatever happens in the deep
Of Acheron happens here. No Tantalus
From people’s tales, benumbed and timorous,
Fears the gigantic stone while in the air

He hangs, but here on earth a terror, bare
Of reason, of the gods torments us all,
While we fear anything that could befall
Mankind. No flapping vultures rip apart
Prone Tityus, and when they reach the heart
They find no food to feed them endlessly
Despite his outspread limbs' immensity
Of not nine acres only – no indeed,
It covers all the world. He'd never feed
Those birds, nor suffer pain, eternally.
But here on earth that Tityus is he
Who's tortured by Love's biting or outworn
By anxious agony or ripped and torn
By one thirst or another. Sisyphus
On earth is also something else to us –
He thirsts for fame but in the end is glum,
Retiring to his grave quite overcome,
For seeking after power's a useless game,
Not given to everyone, an empty name,
A world of toil. That's what it is to push
A boulder up a hill, which, with a rush,
Rolls back down to the plain, where it will lie
And feed ingrates but never satisfy,
Just as the seasons when they come around
To make the earth with new-grown fruits abound
And other pleasant things. Mortals, however,
Are able to enjoy life's blessings never,
Just as, I think, those virgins, so they say,

Poured water which would always drain away
Since the urn they poured it in possessed a crack.
Now Cerberus, the Furies and the lack
Of light and Tartarus, belching out a swell
Of heat, do not exist, as they might well
Not do! But in this life we mortals quail
At punishment for evil deeds – the jail,
The Rock, the torturers, the whip, the rack,
Pitch, red-hot plates, the torch; although we lack
Such things, they're active in the mind: thus dread
Lives in our conscience and it goes ahead
And plies the goads and lashes us nor sees
What is the end of all these miseries,
And we fear that in death they will expand.
Indeed, a fool's life on this earthly land
Is Acheron! Therefore from time to time
Repeat these words: "Even Ancus the sublime
Has looked his last, who was more virtuous
Than you, you rogue, and there've been numerous
Monarchs and potentates who once held sway
Over great nations but have had their day.
The man who built a path across the sea.
Providing passage for his infantry,
Discrediting with his steeds the ocean's roar,
Poured out his soul and then was seen no more,
His light extinguished. Also Scipio,
War's thunderbolt, he who brought Carthage low,
Ended beneath the earth where he was then

No better than a slave. Add, too, those men
Who were the pioneers of everything
In arts and science, those accompanying
The Muses, too – Homer was one of those,
The finest bard of all, now in repose
With all the others. When senility
Informed Democritus his memory
Was fading, he committed suicide.
Epicurus would no longer here abide,
His course now run, who bettered everyone,
Just as the stars are smothered by the sun.
Will you carp at your death, who, while you live,
Seem as one dead? To slumbering you give
A great part of your life. You even snore
While you are still awake, and, furthermore,
You never cease to dream. Anxiety,
Though baseless, dogs your mind, and constantly
You spurn the cause, beset by cares, and reel
About in endless doubt. If people feel
That heavy load and then can also find
The reason why such burdens fill their mind
They will not live that way. For we can see
They don’t know what they want, incessantly
Seeking a new home, thinking that they could
Be happier in a different neighbourhood.
A man will leave his splendid mansion, bored,
But comes straight back since elsewhere can’t afford
Him comfort. With his ponies he will speed

Down to his villa, as though in a need
To douse a burning house: as soon as he
Has touched his villa's threshold, in ennui
He yawns, or else he seeks oblivion
In slumber, or perhaps he hurries on
To town. Each person seeks his self this way
And yet he cannot ever get away:
He cleaves to it in hate against his will,
Not knowing still the reason for his ill
Should he but see that, he would then ignore
Everything else, beginning to explore
The nature of things because he must debate
All time, not just one hour, for Man's estate
Remains forever in eternity.
What can this evil lust for living be,
Imperilling us like this? We all must die,
We can't shun Death – we'll meet him by and by.
We're busy with the same things day and night
And nothing's forged to bring some new delight;
We don't have what we're longing for and yet
It seems the most important thing to get.
We grab a thing but then want something more:
That equal thirst for life eats at our core.
The future is in doubt, Death's threatening,
Nor do we have a chance for lengthening
Our life and all the years of imminent death
We cannot shorten. So, though while there's breath,
Outlive as many people as you may,

Death waits. The man who died but yesterday
Shall have no briefer time in Death’s grim score
Than him who dies so many years before.

BOOK IV

I roam the haunts of the Pierides,
Not trod before, and feel much joy at these
Pure fountains, while I long to drink them down.
I pluck new flowers and seek a glorious crown
To deck my head, where the Muses never yet
Have on a mortal's head a garland set;
I teach important things and try to free
Men's minds from dread religiosity;
On themes so dark I make my verses bright
Throughout the work and all the Nine's delight.
There's cause, for when a doctor starts to treat
A child with nauseous wormwood, with the sweet
Nectar of honey he will smear the cup
Upon the brim: the duped child laps it up
And thus recovers. Since my doctrine might
Mainly seem bitter to a neophyte
And scary to the rabble, it's my will
To use sweet words to coat this sour ill.
So in my verse I hope to keep your mind
Upon the things I teach until you find
The use of nature. I've already shown
The seeds of things and how they on their own
Flit round in everlasting forms, all churned
By endless motion, and from me you've learned
How they create all things, but now to you
I'll speak of something most important too –
That 'images' exist which we might call

Membranes or shells of sorts which flutter all
About each thing. They scare us while we lie
Asleep or when we are awake and eye
The images of souls lost to the light
And weird shapes that have roused us in the night.
O may we never ever be in doubt
That souls do not leave Hell or fly about
Among the living or that anyone
Is left behind when his last day is done,
Body and mind destroyed, each to its seed
Returning. Images of things, indeed,
And flimsy shapes as well, are sent away
From their insides. And therefore need I say
That this is clear to all, however slow
Of wit they are? For firstly we all know
That many things oust matter in plain view,
Loosely diffused, as oak and fire will do
With smoke and heat; and some are more compact
And interwoven, as locusts will act
By casting their smooth tunics to the earth
In summertime and calves will, at their birth,
Drop membranes from their body and a snake
Will cast aside its garments in a brake
Of thorns (we often see them fluttering
On briars). If this is so, then from one thing
Or another slender film will fall away:
Why they should not is very hard to say
Since many tiny particles can be cast

From things and keep the shape that in the past
They had, their order too; being few, they're less
Impeded, giving them more speediness,
Since they are on the surface. We can see
That many bodies are abundantly
Cast out by things not only, as I've stated,
From deep down but also disseminated
From their outside – their very colours too.
The awnings, saffron, red and dusky blue,
Are commonly in splendid theatres spread,
The poles and cross-beams fluttering overhead;
They shine upon the patrons down below
While forcing every countenance to glow;
The darker are the walls, so everything
Laughs glowingly, the daylight tapering.
The hanging curtains, sending out their dyes,
Shine out on everyone, and thus likewise
Must flimsy effigies, since both are thrown
From off the surface. So it is well known
That vestigies of forms will flit around,
Most subtly woven, nor can they be found
By human eyes when they are separated.
Moreover, what can be evaporated,
Such things as odour, heat and smoke, ascend
From deep within the body as they bend
Upon their journey and are wholly rent
Because the gateways marking their ascent
Are far from straight, but when the strips of hue

Are shed, there's nothing anything can do
To rend them since they're placed on the outside.
Lastly, those images which we have eyed
In mirrors, water or the sort of thing
That has a surface that is glittering,
Since with the self-same look they are supplied,
Have images of objects sent outside.
Their shapes and likenesses exist indeed,
But none can notice them as they proceed
Singly, but when they bounce back frantically
From off the mirror's face, we all may see
Its images. There is no other way
To argue how the mirror can display
Perfection in each one. Come, learn how lean
An image's nature has always been -
Seeds are beneath our senses, first of all,
Since for our eyes primordials are too small.
Briefly I'll demonstrate their subtlety:
Some creatures are so small that, cut in three,
One can't see them at all. Therefore surmise
How small their guts are, or their hearts, their eyes,
Their limbs, their joints! Consider, too, the seeds,
Besides, whereby their souls and minds must needs
Be fashioned. They are minuscule as well.
Moreover, what sends out an acrid smell –
Absinthe, panacea, wormwood, centaury –
When you just pinch it lightly, you will see …
…But other images, as you should know,

In many manners flitter to and fro.
Invisible and bodiless. Unless
You think they wander through that wilderness
Alone, however, there are some which fly,
Of their accord created, in the sky
Fashioned in countless shapes. The clouds pack tight
While all those images become a blight
Upon the calm world, ruffling the air,
For Giants' faces often are seen there,
Casting long shadows, while across the sun
Mountains and rocks are sometimes seen to run,
A monstrous beast then dragging clouds behind
Becoming shapes of every different kind.
Now learn how easily and swiftly they
Are spawned, flow off from things and pass away…
…For something always streams from the outside
Of things, which they discharge, then they may glide
Through other things, as they would go through glass,
But when through stone and wood it tries to pass.
It's cracked and therefore it's impossible for it
To send an image back. When a tight-knit
And polished glass, though, or some similar thing,
It meets, that crack would not be happening:
The smoothness rescues it, and it is thus
That all the likenesses flow back to us.
Place something near a mirror suddenly –
Its image will appear: thus you may see
The shapes and textures from a body flow:

Thus many images will swiftly grow
From bodies. It is such a speedy birth!
Just as the sun must send down to the earth
A massive host of lights summarily
So that its beams may be perpetually
At work upon the world, in the same way
There must be sent immediately an array
Of images most multifariously
To all parts of the world summarily.
However to a glass we turn a thing,
It shows both form and hue resembling
That object. Though a clear sky in a twink
Turns turbid with a face as black as ink
As though the darkness was unleashed from Hell
And filled the heavens' mighty vaults pell-mell.
And dreadful clouds rise from the darkest night
While up above looms the black face of Fright,
How small the image is no-one can say
Or reason out. Come now, how swiftly they
Are borne up in the air as on they glide,
But one short hour wasted in their ride
To any region each one plans to reach.
In verses short and sweet I now will teach
You of them all, because a swan's brief key
Is sweeter than a crane's cacophony
Among the South Wind's clouds. So, first of all,
We often note slight objects made of small
Bodies are swift, as are the heat and light

Of the sun, whose primal elements are slight.
They're beaten, as it were, and hurried straight
Along the air and do not hesitate,
Driven by blows behind them. Light dogs light,
Successively making things yet more bright.
Thus through an unimaginable space
Must images have the ability to race
In seconds: a slight push far at their back
Hurries them forward, keeping them on track:
They're borne along with such rapidity
As well, their texture of such rarity
That there's no object which they can't invade
While oozing, as it were, as they're conveyed
Along the intervening air. Besides,
If bodies send, from deep in their insides,
Small particles just like the heat and light
Of sun, and they are seen in their swift flight
Through heaven in one instant, taking wing
Over the sea and land and showering
The sky, what then of those which stand outside,
Prepared, with nothing, once they have been shied
Away, to check them? Don't you see how fast
And further they must go through such a vast
Expanse just when the sun begins to strew
Its rays? What seems particularly true
In showing how fast images move about
Is, when the skies at night begin to spout
Their bright rain, all the stars immediately

Are reproduced in all their radiancy
In water down on earth. It's now quite clear
How swiftly from the heavens down to here
On earth images fall. We realize
That there are particles that strike our eyes
And make us see, and odours constantly
Oozing from objects, as frigidity
From rivers, heat from sun and ocean's spray
Of waves which gnaws the harbour walls away.
And various voices constantly resound
All through the air, and sometimes there'll be found
A salty taste when we stroll on the shore.
When wormwood's being blended, furthermore,
Its bitter stings us. Thus it's plain to see
That particles are carried streamingly
Through every region with incessant speed,
For we have feelings always and indeed
May smell and hear. Besides, what we can feel
In darkness with our hands light will reveal
To be the same as what we felt. Thus we
May gather that the self-same agency
Produces touch and sight. Thus if we feel
A square in darkness, what does light reveal
Except its image? What, then, causes sight
Is images, without which nothing might
Be seen. They're born and tossed around and spread
Into so many regions, as I've said,
But since we can distinguish everything

With eyes alone, wherever we may bring
Our vision, everything affects our sight
With shape and hue; the image brings to light
The gap between our eyes and it. Once cast,
It drives along the air that will have passed
Between them: through our eyes this air then flows
And gently rubs the pupils as it goes,
And then it comes about that we may see
How far away each object has to be.
The longer that the breeze against our eyes
Will last, the further from our gaze it lies.
All these events occur so rapidly
That distance and object are instantly
Perceived. It should not come as a surprise
That all the images that strike our eyes
Cannot be singly seen and yet we see
The very things themselves. For thus, when we
Are plagued by wind and cold or wintry weather,
We undergo their onsets all together,
Not one by one, and thus we get to know
How we become affected by a blow,
As though there were some outside agency
Attacking us. And, furthermore, if we
Should place a finger-tip upon a stone;
It is the stone's periphery alone
We feel and not the hue. Come, then, see why
Beyond the glass an image we may spy
Deep down within, just like the things outside

In their true shape, as when a door may slide
Open, allowing us to see within,
For there's a two-fold air, which has a twin,
That forms the sight. The air comes into sight
Inside the posts, then both, at left and right,
Are at the doors, and then a light is there,
Brushing our eyes, and then the other air,
Then outside in their true shape, objects peered
Upon. When the glass's image has appeared
Before our eyes and thrusts along the air
Between it and our eyes, which we see there
Before we've seen the glass, but once we've seen
That glass, the image that from us has been
Carried reaches the glass and then is cast
Back to our eyes and drives on, rolling fast,
Another air ahead, and this we see
Before itself, and thus it seems to be
Far from the glass… …Each thing, then, comes to pass
By means of those two airs. Now, in the glass
The right side of the limbs is seen to be
Upon the left, returning shakily,
Forced backwards in a line that's not awry,
As one whose plaster mask is not yet dry,
Who hits it on a beam or column where
It keeps its shape as it stays clinging there,
Reversed, and thus the eye upon the right
Seems left, the left seems right. An image might
From glass to glass some few times be passed round,

Because whatever objects can be found
Hiding back in the house, though far removed
In twists and turns, yet they can still be proved
Able to be brought forth and seen to be,
Via each glass, in the vicinity.
The image gleams across from glass to glass
Where left is right, though then the left will pass
Back to its proper place. And you should know
The glass's tiny sides, streamlined to show
Our sides, send back the images with right
Now on the right, either because their sight
Is passed from glass to glass, twice struck away,
Back to ourselves or, at the mirror, they
Wheel round since by its curvature they're taught
To turn to us. It well may be your thought
That lockstep with us in close harmony
They move and imitate the way that we
Deport ourselves, chiefly since, once you stray
From one part of the mirror, straightaway
No image is returned, for Nature's force
Makes everything leap back upon its course
At equal angles, and the sun likewise
Is able to affect our gazing eyes
And blind us, for its rays are very strong,
Able to drive the images along
Down through the flawless air, thus injuring
Our eyes. We find a harsh sheen blemishing
Our eyes because the sun holds many a seed

Of fire, which causes injury indeed.
Also, whatever jaundiced people view,
Whose frames are yellow, has a yellow hue
Since from us many yellow seeds exude
To meet the images, with many glued
Within the eye, and by contagion dye
It with a yellowness. Again, we spy
From dark recesses objects which appear
In light because when this dark air comes near
And holds our open eyes, the shining air
Follows, disseminating everywhere.
The other air sinceit in nimbleness
And qualities of strength and tininess
Excels the other. Filling our eyes with light,
Which once were blocked by air as black as night,
It opens them: then films of things ensue,
Provoking vision – which we cannot do
With objects in the dark, out of the light,
Since dark air follows, blocking out our sight,
Filling each gap so that no film can be
Cast in the eyes to hurt them. When we see
The squared towers of a city far away
They often present a roundness because they
Seem obtuse in each angle or maybe
Aren’t seen at all, because we do not see
Their blow, because through countless strokes the air
Makes blunt the angle’s point, which had seemed square.
Each angle thus has shunned the sense, and so

The stones appear spheroidal, just as though
Upon a potter's wheel, not like things near
And truly round, though: yet they still appear
Vaguely so. Now our shadow, when the day
Is sunny, seems to imitate the way
We move and follows us, if you allow
That air bereft of radiance can somehow
Copy our gait. That which we once believed
A shadow is just air which is bereaved
Of light. Indeed the earth occasionally
Is reft of light when, in our wanderings, we
Obscure its path. If there's a place on earth
That we abandon, we replace its dearth
With light: what was a shadow still will stay
And dog us in the same unswerving way.
Now rays are always flooding in, while rays
Of old disperse, as to a fire's blaze
Wool's drawn. The earth is spoiled accordingly
Of light with ease and just as easily
Washes away the shadows. We, however,
Don't say the eyes are cheated, for it's ever
Their task to note where shadows and where light
Are placed, whether the gleams are just as bright
Always and whether this shadow is the same
As that one and whether the facts we claim
Are really true. The mind must referee
These facts by reasoning. For how can we
Determine Nature's truth with just our eyes?

So, for the fault of minds do not chastise
Our vision. When we sail upon the sea,
Our ship, though borne along, seems stationary.
But when it stands in harbour, we assume
It's moving. Hills and meadows seem to zoom
As under billowing sails we pass them by.
Within the heavens' caverns way up high
The stars seem stock-still, though they go about
In constant motion as they're rising out
And dropping though the sky. Similarly
The sun and moon to us seem stationary,
Though clearly they're In motion, as we've seen
Through reasoning. A tract of sea between
Two mountains far away provides egress
For ships, but they appear to coalesce
Into one island. When boys cease their play
Of spinning, halls and columns seem to sway,
Making them think the roofs will tumble down.
When Nature starts to raise the sun's bright crown
And tremulous fires, to top, apparently,
The mountains (for the sun then seems to be
Tingeing them with its fire), in fact they are
Scarcely two thousand arrow-shots afar,
Or scarce five hundred shots of a dart, although
Between the mountains and the sea below
The massive tracts of ether lies the sea
Where dwell profusions of humanity
And savage beasts. Between the stones there lies

A shallow pool that shows to human eyes
A view of earth below that's just as far
As is the view that reaches every star
In heaven; in this way you seem to spy
Both clouds and constellations, lying high
Above, below the earth. As we may course
Across a stream, we find our galloping horse
Sticks fast as down we gaze, but then we find
Some form or other thrusts it from behind,
And so, wherever we may cast our eyes
Across the stream, each object onward flies,
It seems, the way we do. A porch will stand,
Well-propped all over, parallel and grand,
On equal columns, and then, when we see
Its whole extent from one extremity,
It joins the ceiling with the floor, the right
Side with left, it reaches an obscure height,
Contracting gradually. To sailors' eyes
The sun out of the waves appears to rise
And into them be buried, since they view
Nothing but sea and sky. But to those who
Don't know the sea the vessels, when they stay
In port, appear to lean upon the spray
Of water, powerless about the stern.
The portion of the oars that's raised, we learn,
Above the waves is straight, the rudders too.
But other parts, the parts that sank right through
The water-line seem both broken and bent,

Apparently inclined in an ascent
And turned the other way, seeming to float
Upon the waves. And when the winds we note
Scatter the clouds at night, they seem to sail
Among the stars and blaze a different trail
From their intent. But if beneath one eye
We press a hand, the objects which we spy
Seem double, as bright flowers do as well
And as the furniture round which we dwell,
Men's faces, bodies, and, when in repose
Our slumbering limbs are bound, yet we suppose
We move and are awake: in darkest night
We think we see the sun and bright daylight;
Although we're shut within a room, our eyes
See changes in the rivers, oceans, skies
And hills; we cross the plains on foot and hear
New sounds, although around us night's austere
Silence abounds and speaks to us though we
Hear nothing. Yet more wonders do we see,
Which try to violate belief – in vain,
Since most of them deceive us, for we feign
To see what's hidden. Nought's more arduous
Than separating what is dubious
And what's plain fact. Again, should one suppose
That there is nothing that is known, he knows
Not whether this is known at all, since he
Confesses ignorance. Accordingly,
I won't contend with him, who's set his head

Where both his feet should be. I'll ask, instead,
"What is it to know and not to know in turn?
Are you aware of that? And did you learn
What spawned the truth and what has proved to be
True in differentiating credibility
From what is false?" He has not known indeed
Of truth before. You'll find out that truth's seed
Is in the senses, which can't be belied.
For we would have to find a worthier guide
Than them, which through our own authority
Would distance falsehood from veracity.
But there is none. Shall reason, then, hold sway
From some false sense or other and gainsay
Those senses? Reason was spawned, after all,
Out of these senses, and if these should fall
From truth, all reason's false. Should the ears blame
The eyes, touch blame the ears? Should, by the same
Reasoning, flavor blame the mouth, the eyes
And nose doing the same? Do not surmise
That this is so! To everything a role
Has been assigned, dividing from the whole
Each part, and thus we must perceive the cold,
The hot, the soft apart, and we must hold
As separate all colours. Taste as well
Has its own power and every sound and smell.
No sense, therefore, can have dominion
Over another, and there is not one
That blames itself, since it must always be

Deemed sure of equal credibility.
So what at any time these senses show
Is always true. And if we cannot know
Why objects close at hand seemed to be square,
Though rounded when afar, we should, though bare
Of reasoning, pretend for every shape
A cause rather than let the obvious things escape
And harm our primal faith in senses, lest
We wreck all those foundations on which rest
Our life and safety. Reason then would sink –
Even our very life would in a twink
Collapse unless our credibility
We kept in all our senses, keen to flee
All headlong heights and every dangerous place,
Anxious instead to seek with quickened pace
Their opposites. All words are hollow when
They're spoken contradicting sense. Again,
If a builder mistakes with his first plumb-line
And if the square he uses won't align
With all the lines that dovetail perfectly,
Ans should the level sway but minimally,
The whole shebang becomes incongruous,
All back to front and inharmonious,
Some pieces wonky: in fact the whole thing,
Betrayed because of faulty reckoning,
Will soon fall down: our daily living, too,
Will find its calculations gone askew
When all our sense is false. Now easily

I'll show how senses each their assets see.
All sounds are heard, once to the ears conveyed,
And strike the sense with their own body's aid.
For even sounds and voice, we must confess,
Are earthly since they're able to impress
Themselves upon the sense. And furthermore,
The voice may scream and make the voice-box sore
With scraping and will loudly exit through
The narrow gap and prime germs will ensue.
The opening of the mouth is scraped as well
With air blown outward as the cheeks then swell.
From earthly elements, therefore, it's plain
The sounds originate, with power to pain.
And you cannot be unaware that they
Are capable of taking much away
From bodies and that much of human strength
Diminishes through talking at great length
From early dawn to dusk, especially
When all the words spill out ear-splittingly.
The man who talks a lot loses something
From his own body, so the voice must spring
From earthly elements. And, furthermore,
The roughness of the germs must answer for
The roughness of the voice, just as indeed
A sound that's smooth's created from some seed
That's also smooth. The same form is not found
In trumpets rumbling with a roaring sound
Or a lute's raucous boom or many a swan

Upon the icy shores of Helicon,
Wailing its liquid dirge. Thus when we force
Our voices from our diaphragm, the source
Of sound, our nimble tongue articulates
The sounds, while with the lips it formulates
The words, and when the space is short between
The starting-point from where the sound has been
And where we hear it, we must hear it plain,
Marked clearly, for the voice will then maintain
Its form and keep its shape. But if the space
Is longer than is fitting, in that case
The words across a deal of air must spout
And be disordered as they stream about
Across the winds, and so you may discern
A sound, yet what the words mean you can't learn.
The voice, then, which we hear in some degree
Is hampered, troubled by adversity
And, furthermore, when once a single word
Departs the crier's mouth, it will be heard
By all, and thus we hear it scattering
Through many voices, thus partitioning
Itself for separate ears that they might hear
The form they've planted and a tone that's clear.
But any part that does not strike the ears
Themselves is borne beyond and disappears,
Lost in the winds. A part returns a sound,
From solid porticoes forced to rebound,
And mocks the ear with just a parody

Of words from time to time. Consequently,
When friends have wandered from their chosen track,
You may explain to all how rocks gives back
Like words out of the mountains' wilderness
As we call out to them. I've heard no less
Than six or seven voices that were thrown
From certain places when one voice alone
Had been sent out. The mountains would vibrate
Against each other; dwellers nearby state
That nymphs and goat-foot satyrs there abound,
And fauns which with their nightly antic sound
Will often break the silence, while lute-strings
And, from the Pan-pipe, winning murmurings
Pour out and all the farmers far and wide
Hear Pan, who shakes his head from side to side
And runs his lips across the reeds, in case
The flute should cease to bless this woodland place
With music. Other prodigies as well
They tell of lest folks fancy that they dwell
In lonely spots, by the divinities
Themselves forsaken. That's why they tell these
Tall stories. Or some other cause maybe
Encourages them in their avidity
To pour into folks' ears, as do all men,
All kinds of fabrications. Then again,
You need not wonder how it comes about
That through those places where we can't make out
Clear objects sounds may reach the ears. For we

Have often seen people in colloquy,
Although the doors are closed: through a bent slot
A voice can pass unharmed, but germs cannot
Because they're ruptured, although they can pass
Through apertures that are straight, like those in glass,
Across which images fly. And, furthermore,
A voice is split in avenues galore
Because new voices can be generated,
One from another, once one has created
A second one, just as a spark will spread
And cause a multitude of fires. That said,
Places there are where voices can't be found,
Hidden behind them, scattered all around.
Alive with noise. And yet likenesses all,
Once sent, move straight, and thus inside a wall
One can see nothing, yet can comprehend
The utterances other folk might send
From its far side. The voice itself will sound
Muffled, however, as you wander round
A shut-up house, and strike the ears confused
And, rather than the words that we are used
To hear, we hear just sound. The tongue, whereby
We savour, and the palate will supply
Us with more thoughtful work. At first we feel
A flavour when we're chewing on our meal,
As one would squeeze a sponge: the food then flows
Across the winding pathways as it goes
Along the palate. When the food is sweet

The taste's delightful, as its elements treat
Each spot as round the tongue they're trickling.
However, they can cause us pain and sting
Our senses when they're rough. But next, the pleasure
Stops at the palate, for it has no measure
Once down the throat the food has plunged to scatter
Around the body. And it doesn't matter
What food is fed when you digest it well
And keep the stomach healthy. Now I'll tell
How some find in some foods a bitter flavour
While others will luxuriate in the savour.
Why is there such a difference between
These people? Well, one kind of food is seen
As poison, as a certain snake will waste
Away when it's been touched by just a taste
Of human spit and by autophagy
Expires. Poison to humanity,
But not to goats and quails, is hellebore –
It fattens *them*! What we have said before
You should recall, that seeds are coalesced
In many ways. All creatures that ingest
Their food are outwardly unlike and show
A multitude of shapes. Since this is so,
The intervals and meshes (which we call
Their apertures) must be diverse in all
Their members, even where the palate lies.
Each of them has to be a different size,
Some small, some large, some square and some with three

Corners, though some with more; many must be
Rounded. Depending on the association
Between the shapes of things and their migration,
Each aperture's own shape must deviate
From others and, as textures will dictate,
The paths must vary. What tastes sugary
To one tastes nonetheless unsavoury
To someone else. Smooth bodies must be sent
Into the former as emollient;
Contrariwise, with other folk who find
It bitter rough, hooked elements must wind
Into the gullet. Therefore easily
We may interpret individually
Each case. When fever with a great excess
Of bile should through a person's frame progress
Or he by some other infirmity
Is struck, the body suffers anarchy,
The germs all turned around; it happens then
That bodies, fir before to cause in men
Sensation, can't do so, for they create
A bitter taste: both tastes coagulate
In honey's savour – you've heard me maintain
This often. Now to you I will explain
How smell impacts the nose. There are indeed
Many things from which torrents of smells proceed,
And we must think they scatter and are sped
In all directions, but all smells are wed
To different creatures, since they deviate

In form. And therefore bees will divagate,
Drawn by the scent of honey, through the air,
While vultures will fly off to anywhere,
Drawn by the scent of carrion. A pack
Of hounds will set you on the beaten track
Of savage beasts. The Roman citadel
Was rescued when the white geese caught the smell
Of man. Each creature's given a different scent,
Therefore, that leads it to its nourishment
And makes it shun foul poison: in this way
Its breed is then preserved for many a day.
They differ in how far they are conveyed,
Although there is no smell that can be made
To go as far as sound (I need not write
Of what assails the eyes, affecting sight).
It wanders slowly, gradually to die
Too soon, then is dispersed into the sky –
With difficulty it is sent from well
Within, and, since everything seems to smell
Stronger when broken or when it is ground
Or vanishes in fire, odour is bound
To flow out of its depths and be set free;
And smell has larger elements, we see,
Than voice since it's unable to pass through
Stone walls, as voice and sound commonly do.
And for this reason we can't easily know
Whare scent is situated, for the blow
Grows cold as through the air its leisurely cruise

It takes and, when it brings to us its news,
Is far from hot. Therefore hounds often err
And cast for scent. This also can occur
In aspect whose hues do not always fit
All senses so that people's eyes aren't hit
With too much sting. Even lions dare not meet
The cockerel whose custom is to greet
The dawn with flapping wings and voice so clear:
They always think of flight because they fear
Those seeds which stab their eyes and terribly
Inflict great pain despite their bravery;
But either since they do not pierce our eyes
At all or, if they do, they can devise
Free exit, they don't hurt us. Briefly I
Will tell what stirs the mind and teach whereby
It's stirred. First, many images move around
In many ways, for everywhere they're found:
They meld with ease in air because they're thin,
Resembling the web that spiders spin
Or leaves of gold. In truth they are much more
Thin in their textures than those which explore
The eyes and reach the vision since they make
Their entrance through the body and awake
The mind's thin substance and assail thereby
The sense. And thus it is that we espy
The Centaurs, Scyllas, dogs like Cerberus
And images of those from previous
Epochs, whose last remains rest in the ground,

For images of every kind are found
All over – some that rise spontaneously
Into the air while some are randomly
Thrown off from things, while others are combined
With their configurations. You won't find
A living Centaur, since no entity
Like that has ever lived in history.
The images of man and horse, as we
Now recognize, meet accidentally
Because they're fine and thin in form. The rest
Of images like this have all been blessed
With the same structure. Since they're borne with speed
And are extremely light, as I indeed
Have said before, then any one of these
Fine images bestirs our mind with ease
Because the mind is thin and wonderfully
Easy to move. Now you may easily
Discern from how this happens as I say
That mind and eye must in a similar way
React. I've said that lions I've perceived
By means of images my eyes received,
So thus we're sure the mind is equally
Moved by the images of all we see
Except that they are thinner. Nor is there
Another reason why, when daily care
Is lulled by sleep, our mind contrarily
Is conscious but that when *we're* equally
Conscious, the images are the same as when

We slumbered but to such a degree that then
We seem to see a man devoid of breath,
A dead man mastered now by dust and death,
Because our senses are impeded through
The limbs and cannot tell false from what's true.
Moreover, when asleep, the memory
Lies calm and tranquil and won't disagree
That he the mind has seen alive is not
But long has lain beneath his funeral plot.
That images can move and rhythmically
Wiggle their limbs is no surprise to me –
In sleep they seem to do this. When one dies,
A second image takes its place and lies
In another state, changed by the former one.
This must be thought to be rapidly done.
So great is their velocity and store
Of things, and there are particles galore
Of sense at any moment to supply
The images. I must be clear: first, why
Does the mind think of some whim immediately?
Do the images wait and then, as soon as we
Want it, is there a picture they supply,
Be it the earth, the ocean or the sky?
Does Nature at a word prepare them, then –
Processions, battles, feasts, parlays of men?
Meanwhile, though, different thoughts in that same place
Are happening. Moreover, when we face
Those images in dreams that gently sway,

Arms matching feet in time, what should we say?
That they're well-trained in choreography
And through the night make sport in revelry.
Or maybe it's because, when we have heard
In just a twinkling a single word,
Many times are lurking , which our reason knows
Are there, at any time keen to impose
Their presence in any vicinity.
The images are thin, and so we see
The mind cannot exactly recognize
Each one of them unless it really tries
To squint. Except for those for which it's made
Ready, all of the images must fade
Away. They hope to see what happens when
They've made their preparations; indeed then
That follows. Don't you see that, when the eyes
See something thin, they try to organize
Themselves, without which we can't clearly see?
But even with what can be visibly
Perceived, it will be clear that, if the mind
Neglects to pay attention, you will find
It seems so far removed. Then why should we
Wonder because the mind shows laxity
In all but what it's keen on? We assume
A lot from little, furthermore, and doom
Ourselves to falsehood. And occasionally
We find the image following to be
A different kind: a woman, then, may change

Into a man, or there may be a range
Of different shapes and ages which ensue.
Sleep and oblivion, though, see that we do
Not wonder. Shun this error fearfully:
Don’t think our eyes were made that we might see
The things before us, and do not surmise
That, placed above our feet, our calves and thighs
Enable us to walk, or, furthermore,
The hands, arms and forearms were structured for
Our daily use, because this explanation
Seems such a twisted rationalization.
For nothing in the body was assigned
To help us, but what has been born, you’ll find,
Creates the use. There was no sight before
The eyes were born, no speaking, furthermore,
Before the tongue was made, for its foundation
Existed long before articulation,
And ears preceded sound and, as I guess,
All of our limbs predated usefulness
For they would not have grown up otherwise
To be of any use. Contrariwise, .
Hand-to-hand combat in bloodthirsty war
And mutilation happened long before
Bright spears went flying; men learned to evade
A wound in war before the shield was made.
To yield to longed-for rest, it must be said,
Goes back much further than a pliant bed.
And thirst preceded cups. Accordingly,

What we learned by familiarity
Was made foe the sake of use, we may suppose.
But of a very different class are those
Structured before their use was recognized.
The limbs and senses must be categorized
In this class. So I must repeat once more
That you can't think that they were structured for
Their use. It should not stretch credulity
That all beasts seek their food spontaneously,
Untaught. For many bodies, as I've shown,
Are in so many ways from objects thrown,
But most from living creatures: they progress
Quickly and from their insides many press
Through sweat, wearily panting, and are blown
Out of the mouth. Thus Nature's overthrown,
The body rarefied, and therefore pain
Ensues. Thus food is taken to sustain
The body with nutrition and create
More strength: the lust for food then will abate
Throughout the frame. Moisture goes everywhere
It's needed. Bodies of heat are gathered there
Where moisture snuffs out all the blazing flame
So that the dry heat may not scorch the frame.
And thus our panting thirst is swilled away,
Our craving satisfied. I now will say
How we may walk whenever we have a mind
To do so and with every different kind
Of movement and what caused the urge to do it.

This is what I must tell you – listen to it!
First, images of movement hit the mind,
As I have said before. Not far behind
Comes will, for no-one does a thing until
Intelligence has first foreseen its will,
Which is within the mind. Thus when it starts
Its plan to make a move, at once it darts
Upon the mass of spirit that's consigned
To the whole frame. Since spirit and the mind
Are closely linked, it's managed easily –
The spirit strikes the frame sequentially,
The whole mass moving piecemeal. Furthermore,
The body then expands its every pore,
And air, so sensitive to movement, goes
In streams straight through the opened porticoes,
To even the very smallest entities
Within the body. So it is that these
Carry the body, each in its own way,
Just as the canvas and the wind convey
A ship. That such small things can shake about
So large a frame should not cause us to doubt
The facts. The wind, so gossamer-like, indeed
Can push a mighty galleon with great speed.
One hand and just one rudder can control
How fast it goes and steer to its chosen goal.
Machines move many bodies of great weight
While all their powers barely dissipate.
How slumber floods the frame with quietness

And takes stress from the heart I'll now profess
In brief but honeyed verse, just as the swan
More sweetly trills than honking cranes upon
The passage of the sky. Lend me your ear
And a sagacious mind lest what you hear
You claim's not possible and then depart
From me, showing a truth-repelling heart.
The power of spirit has been drawn away
When sleep appears, while part has gone astray,
Cast out, while another part has vanished deep
Inside, for then the limbs loosen in sleep.
The action of the spirit, there's no doubt,
Sees to it that this feeling comes about,
And when sleep snuffs it out, why, then, we must
Assume it's been disordered and then thrust
Abroad – not all, for then, deprived of breath,
The body would repose in endless death;
Since no part of the spirit, hidden, stays
Within the limbs, as ashes hide the blaze
Of fire, whence could that feeling be aflame
Once more summarily throughout the frame,
As sparks from hidden fires can arise?
How this can come to pass I'll analyze,
And how the soul can be in disarray,
The body languid. See that what I say
Won't scatter in the winds. Primarily,
Since air touches the body, it must be
Thumped by its frequent blows; and that is why

The majority of things are shielded by
Skin, shells or bark. As well, this air will thwack
Our insides as we breathe, then is drawn back.
Since we are beaten on both parts, therefore,
And through the tiny vents blows reach our core,
Our limbs start to collapse gradually.
For body and mind's germs are disorderly.
Part of the mind's cast out, a part subsides
Into the body's regions, where it hides,
A third, drawn through the frame, cannot array
Itself with other parts in any way.
For Nature shuts off all communication,
All paths; when motions change, therefore, sensation
Hides deep. So, since there's nothing there to stay
The limbs, the body starts to waste away,
The limbs to languish; arms and eyelids drop,
And, as one starts to lie down, hamstrings flop.
Sleep follows food, acting the same as air
As through the veins it's doled out everywhere.
Indeed by far the greatest drowsiness
Comes when one's full of food or weariness –
Most elements are then in disarray,
Dulled by long effort, and, in the same way,
At a greater depth part of the soul is cast
Together, and its volume is more vast,
More split up in itself and more dispersed.
Whatever things for which we have a thirst,
Whatever in the past has occupied

Our minds, those interests mainly coincide
With what we dream of: counsellors, then, seem
To plead their cause and make laws when they dream,
Generals go to war and sailors try
To battle winds, while with my writing I
Am occupied. Other activities
Often engage men with such fantasies.
Whenever games have held somebody's mind
For several days on end, we usually find
That, even when these men no longer gaze
At them, there still exist some passageways
Within the mind where images can go.
They see all this for many days, and so
When even awake, they see lithe dancers still
And listen to the lyre's rippling trill
And speaking strings, beholding that same scene
With all the glories that the stage's sheen
Affords. So great, then, is this will and zeal
Which not just men but all live creatures feel.
In fact horses of mettle you may see
Perspiring In their sleep and constantly
Panting, as though with their last strength they vie
To win the palm as from the gates they fly,
While hounds in gentle sleep will often bay
And kick and snuff the air, just as if they
Were chasing a wild beast, then, if brought back
From sleep, they run around as if to track
The image of a stag they see in flight

Until they have recovered and set right
Their error. Pet dogs leap up from the ground,
Shaking themselves from sleep, as if they've found
An unknown face. The fiercer is the breed,
The greater while it slumbers is the need
To show its fierceness. But birds will take flight,
Disturbing all the holy groves at night,
If, as they're sleeping, hawks chase them and fly
At them in hostile manner. By and By
The minds of men, which in reality
Accomplish many deeds, similarly
Do so in dreams: for kings win victories,
Are captured and begin hostilities,
Cry out as though their throats were, then and there,
Being cut, many struggle hard, groan with despair
And with their howling make the region ring
As if they were attacked by the vicious sting
Of a panther's or a lion's jaws. Again,
Many talk of weighty matters, while some men
Perjure themselves, while many folk have died
And many others, too, are terrified
Of falling off a mountain - when they wake,
Like those deprived of senses, how they shake
In turmoil, getting back but narrowly
The feelings that they'd had just formerly!
Some sit beside a stream or pleasant spring,
Thirsty, and end up all but swallowing
It all. And many often think they lie

Beside a piss-pot, and therefore let fly
Their urine, lifting up their clothes, and steep
The splendid coverlets – all in their sleep!
Again, those people who first feel inside
Themselves the semen that the choppy tide
Of youth has placed there sees some element
Flying abroad and seeming to have sent
A lovely face which gnaws the parts which swell
And stain their clothes. As I said formerly,
This seed is stirred up when maturity
Strengthens the body. Different sources lead
To different outcomes. But the human seed
Is drawn forth but by man's ability.
Once it is brought out from its sanctuary,
It's taken through the body, gathering
Among parts of the loins and kindling
The genitals. Excited by the seed,
These parts are nourished by an urgent need
To send it whither craving urge has aimed;
The body seeks out what with love has maimed
The mind. We've all received a wound, and so
The blood jets from where we've received the blow,
And, if he's still nearby, the enemy
Is inundated with our blood, and he
Who's suffered Venus's wounds, be he a lad
With soft limbs or a woman who is mad
For sex, the lover's adamant to go
Wherever is the well-spring of that blow

The lover targets, yearning to unite,
Body to body, to its mute delight.
This is our Venus: from her comes love's name;
And from the first her sweetness' dewdrops came
Into the heart, and then ice-cold distress,
For if your love is absent, nonetheless
Its images are there, and the sweet name
Sounds in your ears. But you should, all the same,
Avoid such images and scare away
Love's food and turn your mind another way
And cast your gathered liquid anywhere
And not retain it, harbouring your care
For only one, avoiding pain, whose sore
Quickens and will with feeding evermore
Continue, for the madness daily grows,
The grief as well, if you don't find new blows
And drop the old, eventually remedying
These too when you again go wandering
With Venus or else turn your thoughts elsewhere.
The man avoiding love still has his share
Of Venus, for he takes her gains while he
Avoids the penalty. For certainly
The pleasure's purer when a man is well
Than when he's lovesick. There's a stormy swell
That stirs the act of love, its course unsure,
Ever uncertain as to which allure
It first should savour. Lovers closely press
Together, causing some carnal distress,

Teeth crushing lips with kisses, for the joy
Is not unmixed, while secret stings annoy
The very thing, whatever it may be,
That caused these frenzied germs originally.
But Venus lightly tempers this distress
And curbs the bites with soothing playfulness;
For herein lies the promise that the flame
Will be extinguished even from the frame
Whence first it came, but Nature will profess
This is not so; the more that we possess
In love, the more we burn with the intent
For lust. Our bodies take in nourishment,
And since these have fixed parts, we're easily
Supplied with bread and water. But we see
In human faces and their lovely glow
Nothing but slender images, although
This wretched hope is often carried off
By winds. In dreams, when someone yearns to quaff
A drink when thirsty, but no drink is there
To quench the burning that he needs must bear,
Within a rushing river, even though
He drinks from it, he still feels thirst: and so
In love games Venus makes a mockery
Of their participants with imagery;
Lovers cannot be sated with a gaze
Nor from their partners' tender limbs erase
Something while with their hands they aimlessly
Wander about their bodies. Finally,

When clasped together, just about to yield
To youthful climax while the woman's field
Is being sown by Venus, greedily
They share their mouths' saliva, heavily
Breathing, teeth pressed to lips – but all in vain:
Nothing can be rubbed off, nor can they gain
Entrance and, thus absorbed, become as one:
For sometimes they desire such union,
It seems. And therefore eagerly they cling,
With slackened limbs, to Venus' coupling,
Delighting in the power of ecstasy.
Then when the gathered lust has finally
Burst from the loins, a tiny breathing-space
Occurs: the frenzy then recurs apace,
And when what they desire they can't attain,
They can't find anything to ease the pain.
The secret wound in such uncertainty
Still plagues them. Think of this additionally:
This labour kills them as they waste away;
As well, they live under another's sway.
Meanwhile one's lost most of his property,
Which now consists only of tapestry
From Babylon. His duty languishing,
His reputation's sick and tottering.
Upon his mistress' perfumed feet there shimmer
Sicyonian slippers, massive emeralds glimmer,
Their green light set in gold, while constantly
He wears a tunic purple as the sea

Well used to soaking up Queen Venus' sweat;
A headscarf or perhaps a coronet
Replaced the fortune that his father made,
Or else a cloak or silks that were conveyed
From Ceos or Alinda, while *chez lui*
Feasts are prepared with splendid finery
And food, drapes, garlands, games to entertain
The guests, unguents, great jars of wine – in vain!
For when all this enchantment's at its height,
A drop of bitterness will come to bite
The wretch amidst the joy. Perhaps a sting
Of conscience will tell him he's languishing
In sloth or that all his debauchery
Will kill him, or his mistress craftily
Has shot a dubious word at him, now set
Within his yearning heart, the fire yet
Alive, or that too freely she makes eyes
At someone else (or thus he will surmise)
And slyly smile. In love that brings success
These ills appear, and all is happiness.
But with a bootless one, such ills arise
In spades, which, even when you close your eyes,
You see. Be watchful, then, as I have said,
Lest you into the snares of love should tread –
For it is easier to cut straight through
The powerful knots of Venus, although you
May dodge the danger, should you not impede
Your progress and do not observe the need

To check the faults of her you want. For when
They're blinded by desire, this is what men
Are wont to do – they credit to those who
Are dear to them advantages they do
Not have. The unattractive women they
Will think of as delightful and display
Their favour of them. One lover will tease
Another one and urge him to appease
Venus as one involved in an affair
That's shameful, while he does not have a care
For his own monstrous faults. A jet-black wench
He calls nut-brown, one lax and with a stench
His sweet disorder; Pallas' eyes are green
And so a girl who has green eyes is seen
As "little Pallas", one stringy and dry
Is a gazelle, another, four-foot high,
Is one of the Graces, full of repartee,
A large one stunning with great dignity,
A stutterer's a lisper, he'll tell us,
A mute one's modest, while an odious
Gossip's a little squib, a girl who might
Be just too thin to live "my spare delight"
Is called, one who's consumptive willowy;
One with enormous breasts turns out to be
Ceres while suckling Bacchus, one whose nose
Is short is called Silena, while all those
With thick lips are "all kiss" – too long a list
To go through! Let her be the loveliest,

However, and let Venus radiate
From her, but there are others, I can state,
And we have lived so far without that one
Who does what unattractive girls have done –
Disgusting odours she will pour upon
Her body while her slave-girls scurry on
And laugh behind her back – we're well aware
Of this. But a lover in the cold night air,
Shut out, upon the steps sets a bouquet
And on the haughty doorposts he will spray
Marjoram oil and, weeping, on the door
Press lovesick kisses. But if he should score
A bid to enter, he'd find sickening
That whiff and seek a decent way to sling
His hook, thus ending his long malady,
So deeply felt, and the stupidity
He now condemns, because he since has learned
That there's no single mortal who has earned
The praise he gave her. Venuses well know
All this, and thus to greater pains they go
To hide such scenes of life from those they aim
To bind in chains of love. But, all the same,
It's bootless, since you can attempt to see
It all and find the source of all that glee.
And if you find her nice, you can concede
That it's mere human weakness and find need
To overlook. It's not always the case
A woman feigns a passionate embrace

With moistened kisses. Often she will act
Straight from the heart, while hankering, in fact,
For mutual pleasure and a love affair
That lasts, or else the creatures of the air,
Sheep, wild beasts, cattle, mares would not submit
To sex if their own ardour did not fit
Their nature when in heat. Do you not see,
When two are bound in mutual ecstasy,
How in their common chains they're tortured so?
Dogs often at the crossroads, keen to go
Their separate ways, will pull with all their might,
While in love's fervent couplings they're held tight.
But they'd not be in this strange situation
Unless they felt that mutual exaltation
That trapped them. Now in the mingling of the seed,
If she should have more power suddenly,
The child will be like her: contrarily
It will resemble him should he eject
A stronger seed. But if in its aspect
It's like them both, in growing, it possesses
The blood of each of them which coalesces.
For as in ecstasy they breathed together,
Venus stirred up the seeds, not knowing whether
Either holds sway. Sometimes a child will be
Like his grandfather or, quite possibly,
Even his great-grandfather in its mien,
Because its parents oftentimes will screen
The many first-beginnings which are blent

In many ways and passed on, by descent,
Through time. Thus there is a miscellany
Of forms remade – the look, the voice's key,
The hair, as with our bodies. Girls spring, too,
Out of their father's seed, while boys ensue
Out of their mother's seed, for each creates
A birth: the one a child approximates
In looks has more than half. This you may see
In either sex. It's no divinity
Who drives away a man's productive force
And sees that he will never be the source
Of darling children, living in the throes
Of barren wedlock, as most men suppose,
Sorrowfully on their altars sprinkling
The blood of many beasts while offering
Their sacrifices that abundantly
They'll fill their wives with seed: it's vanity
To weary all the gods, since he must heed
That he's infertile, for maybe his seed
Is too thick (or too thin). The thin won't stick
And, unproductive, flows away; the thick,
Too closely clotted, does not reach its mark
Or, if it does, it cannot cause a spark
On women's seed. For sexual harmony
Seems very varied: some men's potency
Is great; some women can with ease conceive;
Many in early marriage can't receive
Productive seeds but can eventually

Be favoured with the gift of progeny,
And many men who had a barren wife
Then find her fruitful – thus domestic life
Is blessed with children, who one day will tend
To his old age. It's vital that seeds blend
For generation's sake, the watery
And thick alike. It's vital, too, that we
Eat well, for some foods cause the seeds to grow
Too thick while with some others it will go
To waste. How we have sex is vital, too –
It's thought that birth's more likely to ensue
Through doggy-style, whereby the seeds may dwell
Where they should be. But it is never well
For wives to wiggle about lasciviously,
Thwarting conception as they pleasurably
Jiggle their bums and turn the plough away
From the furrow – thus they make the seeds betray
Their function. Since it is their occupation,
Whores do this to avoid the situation
Of pregnancy and please the men who hire
Their services: this amatory fire
Wives do not seem to want. It happens, too,
Sometimes an ugly woman's loved, not due
To Venus or some god, for sometimes she
By her own conduct and her decency,
Neatness and cleanliness accustoms you
To live with her. For it is habit, too,
That causes love, because a frequent blow,

However light, will finally bring you low.
A stone, when water, falling constantly,
Hits it will wear away eventually 1290

BOOK V

Who can create prodigious poetry
On all these findings and the majesty
Of Nature? Who can speak praise that is worth
His intellect and to such gems give birth
And pass them on to us? Well, certainly
No mortal! For as this known majesty
Demands, he was a god, great Memmius –
O yes, a god, the first of all of us
To find the reasoned plan of life we call
Wisdom and out of such tempestuous squall
And darkness settled it in light so clear.
Compare discoveries of yesteryear:
Ceres, they say, invented corn, Bacchus
Pioneered the liquor of the vine for us;
And yet without these things we could endure,
As they say others do. But when impure,
A mind can't live a good life. Therefore we
Can credit this man with divinity
With better reason, for he has supplied
Great states with solace that has mollified
Men's minds. But if you think you can compare
The deeds of Hercules with him, it's fair
To say you're wrong. For why would we have cause
To fear the great Nemean lion's jaws
Or yet the bristling boar of Arcady?
How could the Cretan bull cause misery?
The pest of Lerna? Or what suffering

Can poisonous Hydra cause? What of the king
With triple breasts? What of those birds of prey
That hunted the Strymphian lake? Or, say,
The steeds of Diomedes, breathing fire?
The beast of the Hesperides, fierce, dire,
Guarding the golden apples, piercingly
Glaring, coiled tightly round the trunk of a tree –
By the Atlantic shore beside the grim
Regions of ocean, what mischief from him
Can we expect? For nobody goes there,
Neither the Romans nor those from elsewhere.
How can such monsters, now they have been slain,
Cause such distress? They cannot, I maintain -
The earth now teems with wild beasts, but our dread
Is mostly of the lands we never tread
Upon, the forests, peaks, woods that lie deep
Below us. If, however, we don't sweep
The evil from our minds, what feuds shall we
Incite, what menaces, whether it be
Our will or no? Lust brings anxiety
To mortals: great is their timidity.
But what of pride and smut and biliousness?
The pain they cause is so calamitous.
Lasciviousness and sloth? The man who's cast
Them from his mind into the icy blast
Of winds by words, and not by swords – should he
Not be included in the panoply
Of gods? – especially since in godlike fashion

He spoke about the gods themselves with passion
And told us of the cause of everything.
His steps I trace, his doctrines following:
How everything abides by the decree
By which they' re made you're learning now from me,
And how Time's solid laws they can't recall.
The nature of the mind is, first of all,
A body that is born but cannot keep
Intact for long, but images, in sleep,
Alone mislead it when we seem to see
A man who's died. My reason, finally,
Is that the world, though mortal, also came
To be created, for it's just the same
With earth, sky, sea, stars, sun and moon; I'll show
What animals arose from earth, although
Some were not born at all; and I will teach
How humans used multiple kinds of speech
By giving names to things, and how the fear
Crept in the hearts of mortals, so that here
On earth their groves and altars we maintain,
Their pools and images; and I'll explain
How Nature steers the motions of the sun
And moon lest it occur to anyone
That they move of their own accord to aid
Increase of crops and beasts or that they're made
To do their work by some divinity.
If those who have been taught appropriately
That gods are carefree, though they're mystified

That life goes on, especially since they've spied
Celestial incidents, they will return
To ancient fallacies and hope to learn
From harsh taskmasters, thinking wretchedly
That they're omniscient, though what can be
Or what cannot be they themselves don't know,
In other words how everything can show
Scant strength and a boundary-stone that's been set deep.
Well then, I'll make no promises to keep
You longer. Firstly, look at every sea,
The earth and sky. They, Memmius, have three
Masses and three foundations, all discrete,
And yet in just one day they're bound to meet
Their end: the great, meshed system of the world,
Upheld through many eons, will be hurled
To ruin. Yet I find it strange to be
Aware of heaven and earth's fatality
And how hard it will be by argument
To prove. This happens when your ears are bent
To something you have not heard hitherto
And cannot hold nor bring into your view
(For this you'll find the truth). Yet I will be
Forthright. The very facts themselves maybe
Will earn belief and shortly there'll arise
Destructive earthquakes right before your eyes.
May fortune spare us this, and may insight,
Not the event, teach us the world just might
Collapse with a dreadful crash. Initially,

Before I start to speak, more solemnly
And with more reasoning than at Delphi
Apollo's oracle was spoken, I
Will comfort you with perspicuity
Lest, curbed by superstition, you maybe
Think earth, sun, sky, stars, moon and ocean's tide
Are heavenly bodies and thus must abide
Forever and believe a penalty
Should be imposed for their iniquity
(Just like the Giants) since with reasoning
They shook the world to quench the glimmering
Of heaven's sun, while also bringing low
Immortal things with mortal speech, although
They're far from holy and don't rate a place
Among the gods, but rather, in their case,
We should believe that they are motionless,
Possessing not a whit of consciousness.
For mind and understanding can't reside
In everything, just as the ocean's tide
Contains no clouds, the upper air can't yield
A single tree, no fish live in a field,
Wood holds no blood, no sap is in a stone:
It's firmly fixed where each thing must be grown
And live. Without a frame mentality
Cannot arise, nor can it ever be
Far from sinews and blood. But if it could
Perform these things, more easily it would
Do so in head, heels, shoulders, anywhere

In the same man, but since within us there
Is seen a hard-and-fast rule and decree
That tells where mind and spirit have to be
To grow apart – thus must it be denied
That it cannot completely live inside
The body's structure, and it cannot fare
In crumbling clods of earth or in the air
Or water or the fires of the sun.
No god-made feeling, then, in anyone
Of them exists, since they aren't animated.
Another thing must be repudiated –
The gods have no abode in any part
Of the world since their thin nature's far apart
From all our senses – thus we cannot see
It in our mind; nor can it possibly
Touch what we touch, because it keeps away
From being touched by us, for nothing may
Touch when it can't be touched itself. And hence
Their homes can't be like ours, for evidence
Shows that they're thin. I will expatiate
Upon this later on. Further, to state
That for the sake of man the gods devised
The great world and should thus be eulogized
And think that it can live forevermore
And that something established long before
In heaven should not live eternally
To aid mankind and not be radically
Forevermore from top to bottom thrust

And be by argument consigned to dust
Is but a foolish act, dear Memmius.
For how could mankind be so generous
As to deserve the gods' philanthropy?
After they've lived long in tranquillity
What novelty entices them to make
A change? For clearly one will have to take
Pleasure in new things once he's been harassed
By old ones. If, however, in times past
He's lived a life of pure serenity,
What then could spark a love of novelty?
What injury, had we not been created,
Was there for us to suffer? Were we fated
To wallow in our gloomy misery
Till light on our creation shone? For he
Who has been born must have a lasting care
To carry on as long as he's kept there
By soothing happiness. However, he
Who's never tasted life would equally
Remain unhurt. Again, whence was the thought
That was the start of all creation brought
To the gods, even an idea of mankind
In order that they might bring to their mind
What they should make? How could they ever see
The power of germs? What, through variety,
May they not do if Nature had not made
A model for creation? A parade
Of many first-beginnings, frequently

Smitten and borne by their own energy,
Have moved and met together and combined
In many structures so that they might find
Something they could produce. No wonder they
Made such designs, displaying an array
Of movements, as this sum of things now shows
As by eternal scrutiny it grows.
Yet granting that I did not even know
About the first beginnings, I would go
So far as, from the ways of heaven, to state
And, from a mass of facts, elaborate
That the nature of all things has not been made
By godly power, for it has been betrayed
By many faults. All that the canopy
Of heaven covers is extensively
Filled up with forests where wild animals roam,
As well as mountains and the sea, whose foam
Parts shores, and rocks and swamps. Two-thirds of these,
Almost, have weather that would make men freeze
To death or die of heatstroke, and therefore
They have been robbed from mortals. Furthermore,
Brambles envelop all the land that's left,
Though men fight back, wont to apply their heft
With mattocks out of sheer necessity.
However, if with all this industry
We could not give them life, no growth could fly
Spontaneously into the lambent sky;
And sometimes, once procured with diligent toil,

When they’re already covering the soil
With leafage, all in bloom, the sun will beat
Upon them with a monumental heat
Or they’re cut off by sudden rain or frost
Or by grim blasts of winds and tempest tossed.
And why does Nature feed and help to grow
The frightful tribes of savage beasts although
They’re mankind’s foes across all lands and seas?
And why do certain seasons bring disease?
Why does untimely death stalk us? Besides,
Just like a sailor cast in cruel tides,
A naked child lies speechless on the earth
In need of vital aid since at its birth,
Cast forth to face the regions of daylight,
It fills the air with cries – as well it might
Considering the miseries that lie
Ahead. Those flocks and herds, though, multiply,
As do the savage beasts: they don’t possess
The need to hear a nurse’s tenderness
Or baby-talk or rattles, nor do they
Need different clothes depending on the day,
High walls to guard their own or weaponry –
From earth they have a superfluity
Of all that they require, for Nature brings
Her ingenuity to fashion things.
Since earth and water and torridity
And wind’s light breezes, which we all may see
Compose this sum of everything, possess

A mortal body, we may also guess
The world is likewise built. For when we see
That beasts have mortal bodies, naturally
They must be mortal too and therefore, when
I see the world consumed and born again,
I may be certain that once in the past
Both heaven and earth were born but will not last
Forever. But you must not have presumed
I begged the question there when I assumed
That earth and fire are both subject to death
When I was quick to say in the same breath
That air and water are reborn and start
To grow again; in the first place, a part
Of Earth, much blackened by eternal heat
And trampled by a multitude of feet,
Exhales a cloud of dust and flying spray
Which by strong blasts of wind are blown away.
Rains wash away some soil, and rivers gnaw
And nibble at the banks and, furthermore,
What Earth feeds and increases then will be
Returned with due proportionality.
Since Nature is the universal womb,
It’s just as certain that she is the tomb:
You see the earth diminishes therefore,
Expands and grows again and, furthermore,
There is no need to say that rivers, sea
And springs always well up abundantly.
But what streams up at first is moved away,

And so the moisture's volume still will stay
The same, in part because strong winds then hit
The surface of the sea and lessen it
And by the sun's rays it is decomposed,
In part because deep down it gets disposed
Through all the earth beneath. The pungency
Is strained off and the moisture oozingly
Returns and everything meets at the source
Of every river, whence it may then course
Along the paths cut for it. Now to you
I'll speak about the air which changes through
Its entire body all the time in ways
So different, for everything that strays
From things is borne into that massive tract
Of air; and if this air did not react
And send back particles to them again,
Renewing them as they fly off, well then
All is dissolved in air, which thus must be
Produced from things and fall back constantly
Into things. The generous fountain of clear light,
The sun, diligently shines in heaven so bright,
Ever renewing beams which, when they fall,
Are lost. When in between that fiery ball
And mortals clouds appear and in the skies
Break up its rays, you now must realize
Its lower part is gone immediately
And Earth's blacked out wherever clouds may be:
Things always need new light, as you now know,

And one by one we lose each dazzling glow,
And we can’t see things in the sun unless
The source of light gives us a limitless
Supply. Again, you see on earth at night
Light’s sources – hanging lamps, all shining bright
With flickering flashes, thick with smoke and fed
With fire in similar manner, keen to spread
Their light around, unbroken (it would seem)
And not departing, for with each new beam
They stop their own extinction speedily
From all those fires. And so, accordingly,
By sun and moon and stars a light’s sent out
That’s always new, and this we must not doubt,
And the first fire is lost once it is sent,
So do not think their force is permanent.
And even stones are conquered gradually,
Towers fall, rocks crumble and eventually
Gods’ temples and their images wear away
And crack so that gods’ powers can’t delay
The fates and strive against the laws decreed
By Nature. We see statues go to seed
And lumps of rock roll down a mountainside
Summarily, unable to abide
The finite tides of time while safe and sound.
Do but observe what holds its arms around
The earth: if everything by them is made,
As some folk say, and, once it has decayed,
Is taken back by them, then you may see

That all is subject to mortality;
For what increases with its nourishment
Other things out of itself must then be meant
To be diminished and revivified
When it takes back those very things. Beside
All this, if there had been one primal birth
That caused creation of both heaven and earth,
Why have not other poets sung before
Events foreshadowing the Theban War
Or Troy's destruction? And into what place
Have so many exploits, lacking bardic grace,
Fallen? The world's young, for not long ago
Was its beginning, I believe. And so
Improvement's being brought to every kind
Of art at different rates; and we may find
That ships are stronger built, while recently
Musicians learned to fashion melody,
While Nature's system of the world has been
Found recently, and I myself am seen
To be the first who's able to report
It in our tongue. But if you are the sort
To think that all of this is just the same
And many folk have died in scorching flame
Or by some universal tragedy
Cities have fallen or incessantly
Torrents have swept across the earth and brought
Destruction on the towns, your very thought
Betrays you, and you'll think that earth and sky

Will be destroyed – when they're bombarded by
Great dangers, if a worse calamity
Then came upon them, there would surely be
Widespread destruction. If someone's unwell
With just the same infection that befell
A man who died of it, we must be known
As mortal. Any body that has shown
Its immortality must be compact,
Thus able to reject each harsh impact,
Keeping its close-joined parts unseparated,
For matter's particles, as I've related,
Are close-joined; maybe it's because it's free
Of blows, just as the void is, similarly
Untouched; or maybe it's because there's no
Space round it whither entities may go
And vanish (since the sum of all of us,
The universe, is ever limitless),
And there's no place where elements may spring
Apart, no bodies, either, that may fling
Themselves upon it and with one strong blow
Dissolve it. But, as I was keen to show,
The world's not solid, since the void is blent
With certain things, and yet one can't assent
That it is like the void; but there is no
Shortage of bodies which may meet and go
Beyond the infinite and overcome
With volleys of destructiveness this sum
Of things; moreover, there's no scarcity

Of space whence it through its profundity
May scatter out the ramparts of the world,
Against which other forces may be hurled.
Death, then, may greet the sun, the earth, the sky,
The sea, for it is ever standing by
With its large, hideous maw: you must confess
They're mortal, and all those things which possess
Mortality cannot feel enmity
For Time's great strength through all eternity.
Fire, water, air, earth, all of which include
Most of the world, battled feud after feud
In godless war: therefore can you not see
An end may come to their hostility?
Maybe all water by the scorching sun
May be consumed: they try to get this done,
So far without success; the rivers bring
A huge supply while further threatening
To flood us all – in vain, it's found to be,
Because winds sweep the surface of the sea,
Thus loosening the liquid, while on high
The sun unpicks them with its rays; to dry
Them up they hope with confidence, that they
May win before the waters have their way.
Their warlike spirit's fierce as they collide
In well-matched contest that they may decide
About a mighty cause successfully;
At one time fire had the mastery;
At one time, too, water, as people say,

Was king across the fields. Fire held sway
And burned up many things, when, very far
From his own bailiwick, Phaethon's car,
Pulled by the sun's strong horses, mightily
Was whirled through sky and earth. But angrily
Great Jove flung down a sudden thunderbolt,
And the ambitious Phaethon with a jolt
Crashed to the earth; the sun then, at his fall,
Took up from him the lamp that lights us all
And, bringing back the steeds that trembled so,
Yoked them again (this Greek tale well you know)
And placed them on their proper path. This song,
However, proves to be completely wrong,
Removed from reason – fire can succeed
When, gathered up, its particles exceed
The average number; but it then, somehow
Thrust back, falls down, or else we all would now
Be thoroughly scorched. Once water, as they say,
Gathered up as well and started to hold sway,
Whose waves destroyed much of humanity,
But in some way it lost its energy:
The rains stopped and the rivers lost a deal
Of force. But next in order I'll reveal
How matter forms the earth, the sky, the sea,
The sun, the moon. For there was certainly
No plan that led their first seeds to array
Themselves in order and they had no say
In how each one of them should fabricate

Its movements; but each seed, by its own weight,
Is borne forever through eternity
Up to our present time and regularly
Is struck and tries out every combination
Of movement, summoning this explanation:
Once they are brought together suddenly
They often start great things through land and sea
And sky, creating the first generation
Of living creatures. In that situation
One could not see the sun's wheel soaring high
Nor the great constellations nor the sky
Or sea or earth or anything that we
Might know of but an abnormality –
An alien storm, a mass of seeds that wrought
Disharmony among them all and brought
Chaos to intervals, connections, tracks,
As well as meetings, motions and attacks,
Because their shapes and forms differed in kind
And therefore all of them were not combined
For long and could not move appropriately
Together. Parts began subsequently
To separate, as like with like would blend,
And parcel out the universe and lend
A shape to things – that is to say, divide
Heaven from Earth and set a place aside
To house the sea alone that it might be
Apart from, in their own locality,
Heavens' pure fires. The bodies of the earth,

Heavy and meshed, merged and took as their berth
The bottom, and the more that they combined,
The more they squeezed out particles confined
Within them so that they could make the sea,
The mighty walls that shield humanity,
The stars, the sun, the moon – their seeds display
More roundness and more smoothness and are way
Smaller than are the earth's. So as it sped
Through the loose-knit interstices to spread
Out of parts of the earth, the flaming air
Rose up and lightly drew away a fair
Amount of fire. Thus, too, we often view
The radiant sun tinting the morning dew
And all the lakes and ever-running streams,
Exuding mist, while Earth occasionally seems
To smoke; and when these join together on high,
Clouds knit a concrete weave beneath the sky.
Thus with coherent body the light air
Bent all around, diffusing everywhere
And fenced in all the rest voraciously.
The sun and moon began sequentially,
Alternatively turning in the air;
But neither Earth nor ether took a share
Of them – with insufficient heaviness
They could not sink and settle: nonetheless
They weren't so lightweight that they could not flow
About the upper air, remaining, though,
Revolving like live bodies In between

Both regions, just as some of us are seen
At rest, some on the move. Accordingly,
When these had been retraced, suddenly
The earth sank down to where the sea spreads wide
And drowned its hollows in the salty tide.
And, blow by frequent blow through countless days,
The earth solidified from the sun's rays
And ether's tide, retreating to its core,
And so the salt and sweat would all the more,
Squeezed from its body, ooze out to the sea
And lakes, extending their capacity,
And so much more those particles of heat
And air flew off and, high above, would meet
And pack the heaven's regions, the plateaus
Were settled down, the lofty mountains rose
In height, whose rocks lost their ability
To sink, nor could all sides to the same degree
Subside. The heavy earth with compact frame
Solidified, and Earth's detritus came
To settle in the depths, and then the sea,
Air, ether, made up of liquidity,
Were all left pure, with some of them more light
Than others, although ether reached the height,
Above the rest, in both consistencies,
And hovers far above the airy breeze
And does not mingle its consistency
With storms, allowing everything to be
Disturbed by violent tempests and harassed

By wayward squalls while sailing safely past
With its own fires. Indeed the Black Sea shows
Ether with just one current gently flows.
How heavenly bodies move now let me sing:
First, if great heaven's ever circling,
The air must press the pole at either end
And hold it from without to keep it penned
From both directions, while another air
Above moves in the same direction where
The world's stars shine, or else another flows
Below and lifts the orb so that it goes
The other way, just as the rivers turn
Their wheels and buckets. Also, we may learn
That it is possible the heavens stay
At rest while all the stars go on their way,
Whether because the ether is confined
And, searching for an exit, has to wind
Around and roll the fires everywhere
Through the night-thundering regions of the air,
Or else the fires are driven from a place
Outside by air, or, with a stealthy pace,
They creep where food invites them to partake
Of nourishment as through the sky they make
Their way. For it is difficult to say
Which cause prevails for certain: for what may
Be done and is indeed done variously
In various worlds is what you'll hear from me:
More causes I'll draw up to clarify

The movements of the stars throughout the sky;
One cause, though, must hold true for us also,
Making the movements of the stars, although
A step-by-step approach can't indicate
Which one. It's proper that the world's whole weight,
In order that the earth may occupy
Its very core, should gradually fly
Away, diminishing; and there should be
Beneath the earth another entity,
United with it since the very start
Of life, tied also to each airy part.
Thus it's no burden and does not depress
The airy breezes, as the limbs no less
Aren't burdensome, and as the human head
Won't tax the neck: as well, let it be said,
We do not feel the body's weight to be
A burden on the feet. Contrarily,
All weights that come from outside and are set
On us annoy, often much smaller yet,
However. What each thing can do is key
In nature, then. The earth, similarly,
Is not something brought suddenly from elsewhere
And cast upon us in an alien air –
It was created from the very start
Of the whole world and is a rooted part
Of it, just like our limbs are. Furthermore,
Earth, shaken suddenly with a thunderous roar,
Shakes everything above itself, a thing

Which it could never do did it not cling
Securely to the airy parts. For they
Have been united since the world's first day
By common roots. Do you not also see
Our body, in spite of its density,
Is held up by our spirit's flimsiness,
Only because its parts all coalesce?
Again, what's able, leaping vigorously,
To raise the body? What else could it be
Except the powerful spirit shepherding
The limbs? Thus something flimsy, mingling
With a heavy body, shows how vigorous
It is, as the mind's strength is joined with us,
And air with Earth? The sun's heat and its wheel
Can't be much greater than the heat we feel
And wheel we see. However far from here
Come rays of fiery light to bring us cheer
By warming us, they lessen not a thing
Throughout this span, not ever narrowing
In our perception. Heat and flooding light
We feel and see, the whole world shining bright
With all its rays: the sun's size and its figure
We then can see, no smaller and no bigger.
The moon, whether she makes the world so bright
As on she travels with her bastard light
Or casts her own light, nonetheless her size
Is just the same as that which meets our eyes.
For things we see afar through lots of air

Become dimmed in appearance before they're
Lessened in size. The moon, whose shape is clear,
Must be perceived on high as we down here
Perceive it. All fires that on earth we see,
While they're quite visible, occasionally
Appear to change but little either way
In size, according to how far away
They are, and so the fires that meet our eyes
Up in the sky must hardly change their size.
Nor should we wonder how the sun, so slight
In size, can radiate sufficient light
To fill the lands, oceans and skies and spread
Its heat upon them all – it can be said
That hence there was created one huge spring
To splash its flood on all of us and fling
Its light, since there are elements of heat
That congregate from everywhere and meet,
Having one single source. Do you not see
How sometimes one whole spring will plenteously
Flood fields and meadows? It is true also
That with but little heat the sun may glow
Profoundly, if by chance the air should be
Apt to be struck by a small quantity
Of heat, as someone may at times remark
A mighty conflagration from one spark
Destroy some corn and straw. And we may guess
The sun, while shining brightly, may possess
Some hidden heat which makes the sun's rays swell.

There’s no one explanation that can tell
How from its summer home the sun may go
To Capricorn amid the winter’s snow
And then to Cancer’s solstice, how indeed
The moon is able, with twelve times the speed
Of the sun, traverse the same space. As I say,
To solve all this there is no single way.
A likely cause is what Democritus
Has with his splendid wisdom left to us:
While different bodies in the sky progress,
The closer to the earth they are, the less
They’re carried by the whirling of the skies;
The rapid energy of their movement dies
Away, the sun is gradually dropped back,
In rear of all the signs of the zodiac,
Because it is much lower than they are;
The moon is lower still and very far
From the sky, closer to earth, and therefore she
Can less vie with the signs: proportionately,
As she is borne with less velocity,
Being lower from the sun, the sooner she
Is outrun by the signs: she seems to go
Back to the signs more rapidly, although
The signs return to her. Quite possibly
From various parts two airs alternately
At certain times could flow, one strong enough
That from the signs of summer it could puff
The sun to winter’s solstice and the blast

Of stiffening cold: another one would cast
Him back again to areas replete
With zodiacal signs and burning heat.
With similar reasoning we must resolve
That moon and stars, which constantly revolve
Through countless periods extensively,
Are blown about quite unpredictably.
Do you not see that clouds scud, driven by
Opposing winds in layers, low and high?
Could not the constellations equally
Be carried through the air's trajectory?
But night obscures the earth with murkiness,
Either because the sun in weariness,
At journey's end, has breathed his fires out,
Or else since he's been forced to turn about
Beneath the earth by the same force that bore
His orb above the earth the day before.
At a fixed time Matuta spreads around
Her rosy dawn to make the world abound
With light, either because the sun on high,
The earth now left behind, reaches the sky
And tries to kindle it, or else maybe
The fires establish a confederacy,
While many seeds of heat are wont to flow
Together at a certain time, and so
A new light from the sun appears each day,
As at sunrise on Ida, so they say,
Are scattered fires seen which then cohere

Into one globe and form a single sphere.
No wonder, though, that this is so, for we
Have seen so many things that come to be
At certain times: at certain times the trees
Will bloom, and when the time arrives for these
To shed their flowers, they do so. Years decree
That teeth fall out, and young lads equally
Will be mature in time, and a beard will grow;
At certain seasons lightning, rain, wind, snow
Occur. For causes thus have ever been
Since the beginning, and all of us have seen
Things happening in this way, and now in turn
And in established order they return.
Days also may increase and nights may wane.
Or days may lessen while the nights may gain
Increase, either because the sun, which glides
Above and underneath the earth, divides
The sky into unequal arcs, and when
He takes a piece from one part he will then
Allot it to the other till he's got
Up to the heaven's sign where stands the knot
That matches day with night. For in between
The North Wind and the South heaven is seen
To hold her turning-points with equal space
Between them, corresponding to the place
Where sits the zodiac, where the sun, as he
Creeps through the earth and heaven annually
In sideways mode and shines, as has been stated

By men of science who have formulated
The regions of the sky and set in place
The signs; or else because the air in space
Is closer here and there, and thus his light
Can easily pass through and scale the height
Of heaven: thus winter nights are lingering
And long until the gleam of day can bring
Us light; or maybe since for the same reason
There tends to be at every different season
A slower and a quicker fiery pace
To make the sun rise in a certain place.
The moon may shine struck by the sun's bright rays
And through the steady progress of the days
Induce that light piecemeal slowly to veer
Towards us as she quits that solar sphere
Until she faces him with fullest light
And sees him setting as she scales the height:
Then step by step, that light she has to hide,
The nearer to the sun we see her glide
From the opposing reason where exist
The zodiacal signs, as they insist
Who claim the moon is round and keeps below
The sun as on she travels. It's also
Possible she possesses her own light
As she revolves, while variably bright.
Another body, too, may move beside
The moon, in many ways as on they glide,
Obstructing and impeding her, although

It can’t be seen because it has no glow.
It’s possible that like a ball she might
Revolve, one half of her suffused with light,
And turn so that her phases are disclosed
In turn in order that we are exposed
To the part endowed with fire, then by degrees
She turns it to her back till no-one sees
That part (a Babylonian theory
With which other astronomers disagree,
As if another’s doctrine can’t be true
Or there’s no decent rationale that you
Should choose this over that). And finally,
The reason a new moon can’t always be
Created, shapes and phases newly set
Each day, the old cast off, another yet
Replacing it is hard to prove when we
See many things created fixedly.
The Spring, Venus, and Venus’ harbinger,
Winged Cupid, marching on ahead of her,
Then Zephyr, and then Flora, scattering
The path before them all and covering
It all with brilliant hues and scents, next Heat
And dusty Ceres and the winds that beat
From northern lands and Autumn alongside
Bacchus, and then ensues a windy tide
And seasons, first Vertumnus, thundering high,
Then Auster, lord of lightning. By and by
The shortest day brings snows and numbing chill,

Then winter, chattering with cold. It will
Seem less surprising if the moon should be
Born and once more destroyed specifically
At some fixed time because that is the case
With many other things. Now you must face
The fact eclipses of the sun also,
And hidings of the moon, can let us know
A number of causes. For why should it be
That Moon can block the luminosity
Of the sun from earth, thrusting her head up high
With her dark orb and yet, as it glides by,
Another body also without light
Is thought incapable of this, too? And might
The sun at some fixed time be able, too,
To get rid of his fires and then renew
His light once through the heavens he has crossed
Places that hate his flames and thus has lost
Them for a while? Why can the earth deny
The moon her light while she is passing high
Above the sun, applying all her force
Upon him, while upon her monthly course
Through the clear-cut and conical shadows she
Glides on, while there's another entity
That cannot pas beneath the moon and stream
Above the sun and interrupt his gleam?
But if the moon shines with her own bright face,
Why should she not grow faint in some fixed place
Up in the heavenly skies while passing through

Regions that hate her light? To continue:
How all things might occur in the firmament
I've dealt with that we may be competent
In understanding how the sun can be
Moved on its course and though what energy
And cause, and how the moon goes on its course,
And how their light's obstructed and what force
Plunges us all in darkness as they seem
To wink and then with open eye to gleam
Once more, and therefore the world's infancy
And fields of tender earth again will be
My theme, what was thought fit to be created
In lands of light and to be delegated
To wayward winds. At first the grasses grew
About the hills and plains with their green hue
And all the blooming meadows shone out green,
And in some trees a great contest was seen,
As with full speed they raced to reach the air.
As on four-footed creatures feathers, hair
And bristles grow, so then the new-born earth
To undergrowth and herbage first gave birth,
And then, to implement her propagation,
She, generation after generation,
Made many mortal creatures differently
Depending on the breed. For obviously
No animal has fallen from the sky
While land-beasts did not ever occupy
Salt pools. It's right that Earth received the name

Of mother because out of her there came
All creatures. Even in our time the earth
To many living animals gives birth,
Fashioned by rain or warm rays that arise
From the sun. Thus it is less of a surprise
That there more and larger ones which grew
Back in the time when Earth and Air were new.
The winged beasts then hatched their young in spring,
Just as cicadas, hoping thus to bring
Life to their brood, in summer presently
Leave their neat husks. The earth, as you may see,
Bred mortals then for fields were very hot
And moist, and when was found a likely spot,
Then, rooted to the earth, many a womb
Would grow, and when in time the young would bloom
And break those roots, the moisture they would flee
And seek the air, and then, quite naturally,
Discharged through all the pores inside the earth,
Came milky liquid as, after a birth,
A woman will produce, because the flurry
Of nourishment is always in a hurry
To reach the breasts. The progeny was fed
By Earth, warmth gave them clothes, grass gave a bed,
Downy and soft. The infant world, we know,
Brought no intensive heat nor freezing snow
And there was no excessive windy weather;
For everything gains strength and grows together.
Again, it’s right that Earth received the name

Of mother, for I've said all creatures came
From her, for every animal everywhere
In the great mountains and birds of the air
At fixed times she produced. But finally,
Worn out with age, she reached the boundary
Of giving birth, for nature's changed by age,
One stage emerging to another stage.
For nothing stays the same: all things migrate
And are compelled by Nature to mutate.
For one thing rots, becoming powerless
With age, another grows contemptuous.
So Earth can't bear what in the past she bore
But can bear what she could not bear before
And many were the monsters that the earth
Attempted to create, which at their birth
Sprang up prodigiously, and one of these
Had neither male nor female qualities
Completely, some *sans* feet, some handless, some
Produced without a mouth, totally dumb,
Some blind, some with their limbs all tightly stuck
Together, so that they had the ill luck
Of being constrained from going anywhere
Or doing anything, quite unaware
Of how to sidestep trouble or partake
Of what they needed. Such a huge mistake
In Nature! For she banned their growth, and so
They could not reach maturity and grow,
Find food or know of sexual intimacy,

For we see that we need society
So that we might together procreate
And future generations fabricate.
There must be food, and, next, a way for seeds
To go throughout the frame and serve its needs.
Both male and female must unite so they
May please each other in their sexual play.
So many breeds of animals must have died
Back then because those beasts had been denied
The power to provide posterity
With one more generation: what you see
Feeding upon life's breath must from the start
Have been protected by some cunning art
Or speed or courage. Many still remain
Among us and contribute to our gain
In our protection. Lions primarily
Have been protected by their bravery,
The fox by cunning and the stag by speed.
Those creatures that were sprung, though, from the seed
Of beasts of burden and the clever hound
That's ever watchful with a heart that's sound
In duty, sheep and oxen, Memmius,
Have been produced to be preserved by us.
For they have fled wild creatures eagerly,
Attaining peace and nourishment which we
Gave them for their responsibilities.
But those possessing no such qualities,
Who cannot live alone by their own will

Nor be of use to us that we might fill
Their bellies, keeping them unthreatened, lay
At the mercy of so many men for prey
And profit, hampered by the chains they wore
Till they became extinct. But no Centaur
Ever existed, and there cannot be
At any time among humanity
Two-bodied beasts with limbs that did not fit
Their bodies. Here is proof the dullest wit
May grasp. A horse is strongest when he's three
Years old; a boy, though, categorically,
Is not, for even then, when he's at rest
Asleep, he seeks his mother's milky breast.
But when a horse's power begins to wane
And life recedes, then boyhood starts to reign
And clothes his cheeks with down. So don't allow
That there were Centaurs that were made somehow
Of seeds of man and horse, or that a swarm
Of ravening hounds of hell could help to form
A half-fish Scylla or monstrosities
That are as incompatible as these;
Nor is it ever at the self-same time
They lose their bodily strength or reach their prime
Or fade with age or burn with ardency
Alike nor in their practices agree.
A goat on hemlock may grow fat despite
The fact that it could kill a man outright.
Since fire can scorch a lion and every kind

Of being made from flesh and blood combined,
How could it be that there's a prodigy
On earth, a triple-framed monstrosity,
A lion In front, a snake behind, a goat
In the middle, breathing fire out of its throat?
So he who thinks that when the sky and earth
Were new such creatures underwent their birth ,
Depending on that empty 'novelty',
Could babble out his nonsense endlessly
With equal reason, saying that long ago
Across the earth gold rivers used to flow
And trees grew jewels and that every man
Had limbs so large that he could easily span
The seas on foot and turn the sky around
With his own hands. Many seeds indeed were found
When beasts were first created on the earth,
But there's no proof that anything gave birth
To creatures of mixed growth, their limbs combined
With limbs of creatures of a different kind.
Although so many plants and grains and trees
Abound, nevertheless not one of these
Is joined to something else, for everything
Evolves in its own way, surrendering
To Nature's laws. Besides, the race of men
Was so much hardier on the land back then,
Because the hard earth made it; for the race
Had larger and more solid bones to grace
The sinews that they might not be oppressed

By heat, cold or strange food or be distressed
By illness. So they passed their lives throughout
Millennia like all wandering beasts. No stout
Ploughman was there, none worked upon the land
Or sowed new seeds or, sickle in one hand,
Lopped branches from tall trees. They were content
With what the sun and showers of rain had sent
And what the earth produced. Primarily
They feasted from the acorn-laden tree;
And arbute-cherries, which, when winter's due,
We now see ripen with a crimson hue,
Were even more abundant than we see
In present times. The flowering infancy
Of the world produced more kinds of nourishment:
Though they were hard to chew, they caused content:
Rivers and springs called out to quench one's thirst,
Just as today torrents of water burst
Down from great mountains, calling far and wide
To wild beasts that they might be satisfied.
The woodland haunts where the Nymphs were wont to dwell
(Which, in their wanderings, everyone knew well)
They made their home, where rivulets would cross
The wet rocks as they dripped upon the moss
And welled and bubbled through the level land.
Making a fire they did not understand
Nor wearing animal skins, thus to evade
The elements; and mountain-caves they made
Their homes as well and woods; they hid away

In undergrowth to dodge the winds and stay
Untouched by rain. Nor could they mediate
About the common good or regulate
Their intercourse with laws. What fortune brought
Each man would carry off, for he'd been taught
To be strong in himself. And lovers mated
In the woods, either since she was captivated
By joint desire or taken forcefully
With vehement lust or bribed (that bribe could be
Pears, berries or acorns). Supported by
Their powerful physiques, they would let fly
Their stones and clubs at beasts: they overpowered
Many of them, for from but few they cowered
In hideaways. And at the close of day
Like hogs, quite naked, on the ground they lay,
Rolled up in leafage. Nor did they in fright
Cry out in yearning for the morning light
But, wrapped in sleep, they waited silently
Until the rosy face of dawn they'd see –
From childhood they had known that day and night
Take turns and therefore felt no awe or fright
That light would be removed and night would last
Forevermore. No. something else would cast
A pall on them – wild beasts disturbed their rest:
For they would leave their rocky homes, distressed
To see a lion or foaming bear appear
At night, and leave their leaf-strewn beds in fear.
Yet not much more than now did men, with rue,

Depart from life's sweet light, although it's true
That one man or another would be trapped
By some wild beast as on his flesh it snapped:
The forests, woods and mountains would resound
With groans as in those vicious jaws he found
A living tomb, while those who got away,
Though mangled, held their hands in their dismay
Over their ghastly wounds and prayed for death
With dreadful cries till they were reft of breath,
Not knowing medicines that could mend
Their wounds. One single day, though, would not send
Thousands of men to die on the battleground
And violent billows didn't blow around
Vessels and mariners to make them split
Upon the rocks. For back then all of it
Was pointless that such storms rose on the sea,
So all its empty threats it easily
Dismissed, and so nobody met his end
Through witchcraft since the sea was now his friend.
So navigation's wicked artistry
Lay hidden. In those days the scarcity
Of food caused death. But now its opposite
Is true – we're dying from excess of it.
Back then men killed themselves unwittingly
With poison, but that poison skilfully
We give to others. Once folk had possessed
Huts, skins and fire and mankind had been blessed
With wedlock and had raised a family,

They fell into a pampered luxury:
Having discovered fire, they complained
About the cold more often; Venus drained
Their strength; the children used cajolery
To coax their parents; and eventually
Neighbours grew friendly in their eagerness
To shun wrongdoing and ferociousness,
Seeking protection for all progeny
And women, signifying haltingly
By word and gesture that it is but fair
To pity fragile people everywhere.
But peace could not be made in every way,
Although a good part (most of it, I'd say)
Remained unblemished, otherwise the earth
Would have been emptied of mankind and birth
Eradicated. Many sounds were brought
To people's tongues; later convenience wrought
The names of things, as infants' speechlessness
Makes them rely on gestures to express
Themselves, using a finger possibly
To point out something they'd like one to see
Each in his own way. Calves, before one sees
Their horns stand out upon their heads, with these
Will butt in anger, pushing viciously.
Panthers' and lions' young similarly
Will use their feet and teeth when in a fight,
Although they yet can barely kick or bite.
All winged fledglings also we may see

Try out their pinions' strength unsteadily.
To think that someone gave out names, therefore,
To things and people learned from him, what's more,
Their first words is but muddle-headedness.
For why should he give tongue to various
Sounds and name everything, while equally
Others could not? While in their colloquy
Folk used these titles, whence did they attain
The knowledge of their use? Whence did they gain
The power to learn their purposes and see
Them all in their mind's eye? For certainly
He hadn't got the influence to show
To them that these things they wanted to know.
Nor can one easily teach in any way
To men what should be carried out when they
Won't hear, unwilling to endure what he
Keeps dinning in their ears continually
To no avail? What's so amazing, then,
That, having active sounds and tongues, all men
Distinguished everything by varying
Sounds that will suit what they're experiencing?
For all dumb beasts use different sounds to show
What they are feeling, be it fear or woe
Or joy. Molossian hounds growl angrily,
Teeth bared, when they're provoked, quite differently
Than when they loudly bark. But when their young
They lick affectionately with their tongue,
Tossing or nipping them, as though intent

On gently swallowing them, their yelps are meant
Quite differently from when they loudly bay
When left alone at home or cringe away
From a blow. A horse is different when he neighs
Amid the mares while in his lusty days,
Struck with the spurs of love and snorting out
Through his wide nostrils just before a bout
Of wantonness, than when senility
Causes a neigh that quivers. Finally,
Ospreys and hawks and divers, every race
Of birds that seek a life above the face
Of salt-sea waves cry in a different way
When, fighting for some food, they find their prey
Fights back, than other times. Their harsh-toned song
Some birds change with the weather, like the throng
Of ancient crows and rooks when, as they say,
They cry for wind or call for rain to spray.
Therefore, if animals, though they are mute,
Are made to give out different cries to suit
Their moods, how much more natural would it be
That they, too, showed each feeling differently
Through sounds! If you should quietly wonder, then,
Lightning was first to send down fire to men,
Whence blazing flames spread out across the world.
For we see flames from high above us hurled,
Igniting many things whenever a blow
From heaven brought them heat. And yet, also,
If a tree with many branches happens to rest

Against another tree, fire is pressed
From it by friction: sometimes there's a flash
Of burning flame as trunks and branches clash.
Either of these two causes could have brought
Fire to all mankind; the sun then taught
Us how to cook and soften food with flame
Since people saw that many things became
Mellow, defeated by the blazing rays
Of heat amid the fields. Then, as the days
Advanced, wise men taught people how to change
Their style of living and to rearrange
Their ways. Kings founded cities and erected
Towers that their subjects might be protected;
Cattle and lands were, in conformity
With beauty, strength and ingenuity,
Divided up, for strength and beauty then
Were most important. Afterwards, by men
Was gold discovered, and wealth took from these
Strong, handsome folk their decency with ease;
No matter, in that case, how fair and strong
A man may be, a richer man he'll long
To follow. But to live honourably,
A man possesses great prosperity
If he's content with little – that indeed
Is never lacking. People, though, felt need
Of fame and power that their fortune could
Be firmly set and being wealthy would
Give them a quiet life – but all in vain,

For in the upward struggle to attain
The peak of honour, they have made their way
A dangerous one, and even after they
Came down, a thunderbolt would sometimes cast
Them into Tartarus and, like that blast,
Envy would scorch the summits frequently
And those above the rest, Accordingly,
It is much better to obey in peace
Than to desire to make your wealth increase
And govern kingdoms. Therefore let them sweat
In blood upon the narrow path to get
Their wealth and struggle wearily in vain,
Since from the lips of others they'll attain
Their wisdom, chasing things from mere hearsay,
Not what they feel. This folly, though, today
Does not succeed, nor will it ever be
Successful any more than previously.
Kings, then, were slain; the pomp of yesterday
And those proud sceptres in the dust now lay.
Fine crowns beneath the feet of peasants, stained
With blood, now lay and bitterly complained
Of their lost honour: folk were keen to tread
On that for which they used to have such dread,
So all things reached the dregs of disarray
As every man struggled to take away
The prize of high command. Then they were taught
To set up magistrates, and then they brought
In laws. Mankind then, weary of the taint

Of all the violence that they bore, grew faint
With feuding and were ready to agree
To strict statutes. For when men angrily
Set on revenge more keenly than was right
By law, mankind was weary of the sight
Of violence. The fear of penalty
Taints life's rewards; bloodshed and injury
Ensnare each person and, for the most part,
Recoil upon the one who caused their start.
It is not easy for a man to glide
Straight through a peaceful life when he's defied
The bonds of common peace. Yet even though
He hides his deeds from all, he cannot know
That they will stay unseen. For it's been said
That many often, as they lie in bed,
Will speak out loud or else, delirious
With fever, rave, their secret actions thus
Revealed. Now it is easy to explain
Why in great lands the gods have come to reign,
The cities filled with altars while great care
Was taken with the rites which everywhere
Flourish in mighty states, and every man
Feels awe and helps to raise new shrines to span
The world and bring to every celebration
His fellow-Romans. Every generation
Of men in those days saw in their minds' eye,
And more in sleep, gods made conspicuous by
Their form and beauty. So they had no doubt

That they could feel, seeming to move about
And say fine things in keeping with the way
They looked and showed how strong they were. So they
Gave them eternal life, since they would see
A slew of like-shaped forms, especially,
However, since their power was so great
That they would be too hard to dominate.
They guessed that they were steeped in happiness
Because their thoughts of death brought no distress,
And in their slumbers they would also see
Them doing wondrous things, all scathelessly.
They saw each sequence of the sky appear
And all the various seasons of the year
In strictest order, though they could not see
Their causes. So they found security
In leaving all to the gods. Up in the sky
They placed the gods' abode because on high
The moon, the sky, the solemn stars, the night,
The torches and the flames, all shining bright,
Clouds, sun, rain, lightnings, hail and winds and snow,
Swift roars and rumbling thunderbolts all go,
Revolving. O unhappy humankind
That to the gods these actions they've assigned,
Yet bitter wrath as well! What groans did they
Give out, what wounds they left for us today,
Tears for the future! It's no piety
To cover up one's head regularly,
Approach a stone and every shrine, descend

Upon the ground and to the gods extend
One's palms over an altar or to flood
That altar with the sacrificial blood
Of beasts while linking vow to vow; for he
Is pious who with pure tranquillity
Surveys all things. For when we look up high
Across the shining temples of the sky
And all its stars, when we think of the sun
And moon, and how they move, then every one
Of us, already crushed by misery,
Discovers now one more anxiety
That the gods' immeasurable strength embraces us,
A strength that moves the stars in various
Motions – the question causes anxious care:
For was the world created? And is there
A limit that will let the world remain
Until it can no longer bear the strain
Of restless motion? Did the gods decree
Its walls, though, should live on eternally,
Despising time's strong power? Is there a mind
That does not fear the gods in all mankind?
Whose limbs don't crawl with terror when a bolt
Of thunder shakes the earth with a shocking jolt
And rumblings run across the mighty sky?
Don't nations tremble, don't proud monarchs shy
Away in fear of the gods lest through some sin
Or haughty word grave time may usher in
Their punishment? When winds blow violently

And sweep an admiral into the sea,
With troops and elephants, does he not crave
The gods' concord with vows thereby to save
Himself and pray that all the winds may cease
And favouring breezes bring him back to peace? –
In vain, for often in a furious gale
He gets entangled and is doomed to sail
Into the shoals of death. Humanity
Is ground down by some hidden energy
Which on the rods and axes of success
Appears to trample with derisiveness.
When the whole earth trembles beneath us, when
Cities collapse or barely stand, why then
Men feel self-hate – and this is no surprise –
And leave it to the gods to supervise
All things, acknowledging their potency.
Now I will speak of the discovery
Of silver, copper, gold, iron and lead
When fire from the mountains came and spread
And scorched the forests, whether some lightning flashed
From heaven or else because in war men clashed,
Burning them, thus to full the foe with fear,
Or, since the soil was rich, some wished to clear
The fat fields for their pasture, or that they
Might kill the wild beasts and enjoy their prey;
For there were hunts with springes and with flame
Before men fenced their glades and put up game
With packs of hounds. However that may be,

Whatever, with its grim cacophony,
Had brought about the blazing heat and burned
The forests to their very roots and turned
The land to ash, the hollows of the earth
And her hot veins proceeded to give birth
To those five elements I named before,
Which oozed out and collected from her core.
When people saw their hues, coagulated
And radiating, they were captivated
By their smooth grace and saw they had the same
Contours as did the hollows whence they came,
And then they noted that each element
Could be dissolved by heat and thus be bent
In different shapes and beaten, furthermore,
Into the finest edge and laid in store
As tools that they might cut down trees or hew
Timber or plane planks smooth, or puncture, too.
They tried to make these things initially
Of silver, gold and bronze (which they could see
Was just as tough), but it was all in vain
Because, though strong, they could not take the strain:
They found the work was all too rigorous.
Unlike the bronze, the gold was valueless,
They thought, because its edge was far from keen,
But now bronze is disdained while gold is seen
As quite the best. Things change as seasons glide
On by: what once was prized will be denied
Its worth one day. Something that people flout

Will one day lose that taint and be sought out
As time goes by and, once discovered, thrive
And be extolled by every man alive.
Now you will recognize with little fuss
How iron was discovered, Memmius.
In ancient times the arms with which one fought
Were hands, nails, teeth, stones, branches which were sought
From forest trees and broken off, then flame,
Once it was known. Then iron and bronze both came
Into man's ken – bronze first, since it was more
Easily worked, comprising a greater store.
Men tilled the earth with bronze, with bronze as well
Stirred up the waves of war and rushed pell-mell,
Inflicting dreadful wounds, and took away
Cattle and lands. Men readily gave way,
When naked and unweaponed, to a foe
Well-armed. The iron sword would slowly grow
In stature, while the scythe of bronze would fill
Mankind with scorn, and they began to till
The earth with iron, and the odds of war
Were equal, as they had not been before.
In ancient times a man would mount his horse
In arms and with the bridle steer his course
And fight from there before he was to face
The hazards of war while his two steeds would race
Before his chariot. There was a stage
Of four-horsed chariots before that age,
And chariots equipped with scythes. And then

Lucanian oxen – elephants – with men
On turrets on their backs, a hideous mob,
With snakes for hands, well taught to do the job
Of hoodwinking the foe while suffering
The wounds of war. Discord kept ushering
In further ills to fright the souls of men
And the terrors of warfare again and again
Would grow. They tried to further their fierce wars
With bulls and beat the foe with vicious boars.
Some let slip lions to the enemy
With men to exercise their mastery
With arms and shackles - but in vain once more,
For, heated with the sight of blood and gore,
They ran amok, confusing everything
On either side, their fierce manes quivering.
The horses at the noise were terrified,
Nor could their riders calm them down or guide
Them at the enemy, while angrily
The lionesses leapt haphazardly,
Attacking anyone they chanced to find
And, turning round, would lash at those behind
And maul them to the ground with their strong jaws
And hold them, weak with wounds, with curving claws.
Bulls tossed and trampled other bulls, and they
Ripped at the horses, for their horns would lay
Them flat, and raked the earth up threateningly.
Boars tore at other boars and furiously
Splashed broken weapons with their blood and wrought

Promiscuous mayhem on whoever fought,
Riders or infantry. The steeds would swerve
Aside to dodge the wildly lunging curve
Of tusks or paw the air, but bootlessly,
For, hamstrung, they'd collapse and heavily
Cover the ground. If men before had thought
The horses amply trained, yet when they fought
They saw them growing heated with the flight,
The terror, tumult, uproar and the blight
Of wounds and could not bring them back, for they
Would scatter far and wide beyond the fray,
Just like the elephants, so lacerated
With weapons after they had mutilated
So many of their kind. But did they do
All this? I barely trust it can be true
That, after such destruction fell on all,
They could not have believed this would befall;
You might maintain this happened, though, elsewhere
In different ways in any place you care
To think of. Yet they didn't go to war
In hope of conquering but wishing for
A chance to disconcert the enemy,
Though they themselves would die through paucity
Of arms and numbers. Tied clothes people wore
Before knitwear, though iron came before
The latter since they needed it to fit
Upon the loom, and smoothness, lacking it,
Could not have been achieved due to a lack

Of treadles, shuttles, spindles and the clack
Of leash-rods. Men before all womankind
Plied wool (because the male sex leaves behind
The female sex in their ability),
Till dour farmers called indignity
Upon it, and the men let women ply
The wool and turned to toil to fortify
Their bodies. Nature, though, instructed men
In the art of sowing in the fields, for when
Berries and acorns fall, sequentially
A swarm of seedlings lies beneath the tree,
Whence shoots into the boughs were introduced
And in the fields new slips were then produced;
And men received a certain delectation
In finding different ways of cultivation,
Wild fruits becoming pliant when they found
They welcomed friendly tillage in the ground.
As time went by, they made the forests go
Yet higher in the hills, the place below
Left for their tillage, so that there might be
Crops, meadows, pools, streams and a quantity
Of fertile vineyards and that a grey-green
Region of olives burgeoning between
And over every hill and dale and plain,
As now you see upon the whole terrain
A picturesque miscellany laid out
With fruit-trees and plantations set about.
To imitate birds' trilling notes came long

Before man could delight his ears with song.
Winds whistling through the reeds taught men to blow
Through hemlock-stalks, and slowly they would know
To place their fingers on a pipe they made
From reeds which they'd found in some forest-glade
Where shepherds took their solitary ease
In the open air, and play sweet elegies.
These airs they took delight in when replete
With food, for that is when all things are sweet.
Often with friends on the soft grass hard by
A stream beneath a tall tree they would lie –
A joy with little cost – especially
When the weather smiled and floral greenery
Abounded. Then the order of the day
Was peals of pleasant laughter, chat and play,
For then the rustic muse was vigorous.
Then, prompted by a joyous playfulness,
They'd put on wreaths and march, though raggedly,
And beat the earth, full of hilarity:
All things were thriving, wonderful and new,
And, when they were awake, this was their due
For when thy slept – to warble songs and play
The reed-pipe, whence the watchmen of today
Keep the tradition, and they have been taught
Many tempos, although it has never brought
No more enjoyment to them than was felt
By those who came from Mother Earth and dwelt
In woodlands. For what stares us in the face,

Unless we've seen something with greater grace
Before, gives great delight and seems to be
The best, till what seems better usually
Spoils that which modifies our liking for
What's ancient. Men thought acorns then a bore
And left their old beds, strewn with leaves and grass;
Clothes made of wild beasts' pelts now did not pass
Muster: great envy all those years before
Provoked, I think, the death of him who wore
It first through treachery and it was torn
Apart so it no longer could be worn.
First pelts, then gold and purple clothes, therefore,
Plagued men and wearied all of them with war.
The blame lies mostly, I believe, in us –
Though earthborn people found it torturous
To wear a pelt in winter, nonetheless
Purple with gold designs brings no distress
While we can use a poor man's covering.
In vain mankind is ever labouring,
Consumed with empty cares, obviously
Because it does not know the boundary
Of ownership and also does not know
To what extent real happiness can grow.
And by degrees man's lived upon the seas
And stirred up billows of hostilities.
Those watchful sentinels, the moon and sun,
Who gleam around the heaven's dominion,
Taught men that all the seasons come around,

All done in order that is fixed and sound.
Now men had citadels, well fortified,
And earth was meted out and classified.
Now sailing-ships were seen upon the seas,
And friends and allies formed confederacies.
Bards glorified great deeds in poetry
(Letters had been devised just recently)
So we cannot look back on yesterday
But that our reasoning will show the way.
Roads, weapons, agriculture, navigation,
Decrees, all kinds of clothes, fortification,
Life's prizes, luxuries from first to last,
Verse, art, smooth statues dexterously cast –
All these improved as mankind gradually
Progressed through practice and capacity.
Thus by degrees time brought us everything,
Which was revealed to us by reasoning.
By intellect all these things man could see
Until they had attained their apogee.

BOOK VI

Athens was first to spread abroad her grain
For sick mankind – she gave men life again,
Creating laws and giving consolation,
Spawning a man with crystal penetration,
A wise truth-teller who, though he is dead,
Has had his name for many aeons spread,
Because of his divine discoveries,
To the domain of all divinities.
For when he saw that mankind's every need
Had now almost been met and that, indeed,
As far as possible they were risk-free
And saw men rolling in prosperity,
Honoured and famed, proud fathers, nonetheless,
At home, experiencing uneasiness
And bitterly lamenting, he then saw
That mankind's vessel was itself the flaw:
For everything that came from the outside
Perverted and tainted what was inside,
However advantageous, partially
Because it leaked and he could clearly see
That it could not be filled in any way,
And partially because, as one may say,
With a foul smell it was contaminated,
And so with true words he regenerated
The heart and limited fear and desire
And showed that chief good to which we aspire
And pointed out the narrow path that we

Might take to reach that goal unswervingly
And all the sin that lingers everywhere
And lives among us, flying here and there
By chance or force, as nature had designed
And from what ports they might be met. Mankind
Did not have cause to irritate its breast
With waves of misery, he would attest.
For just as little children shake with fright
At all things in the darkness in the night,
So we sometimes quake in the light of day
At what should cause fear no more than what they
Feared in the dark. So this despondency,
This terror of the mind will have to be
Dispelled, not by the sun's bright shafts of day
But nature's law. So I'll get under way
And weave the web of my discourse. Since I
Have shown the heavens are mortal and the sky
Has given birth, explaining principally
What has been done there and what needs to be
Accomplished still, to what remains give ear.
Since I am now the Muses' charioteer,
How winds arise and then are pacified
I will explain and tell what men have spied
In earth and heaven and were frequently
Held in suspense with great trepidity,
Abused by fear of the gods, kept crushed below
Upon the earth because they did not know
The cause of things, thus pressured to assign

Events to those they thought of as divine.
If those who are well taught and therefore know
The gods have carefree lives, yet even so
Wonder how things occur, especially
Those things up in the sky that we can see,
They fall back on their ancient veneration
And take harsh masters their imagination
Accepts as absolute, since they have got
No knowledge of what can and what cannot
Be done, thus how the power of each thing
Is firmly fixed: so by blind reasoning
They're led astray. Therefore, unless you spew
This from your mind and throw out far from you
Those thought unworthy of divinity,
Hostile to peace, their holy sanctity
Will often do you harm. The gods, however,
Cannot feel such dishonour as to ever
Thirst to inflict on you fierce punishment.
No, you believe that they, in their content
And peaceful lives, are threatening to throw
Waves of great rage that you may never show
Your piety at their shrines or ever be
Able to welcome with tranquillity
Their images. What will from that ensue
Is clear. By reasoning that's wholly true
You must reject a life like that. A deal
Of words I've said, but much more I'll reveal
In polished verse. We must see how the sky

Functions and know the law it's governed by;
I must sing tempests and bright lightnings, too,
By what cause they are moved and what they do,
Lest you divide the heavens senselessly
In sixteen quarters, trembling to see
From which of them the fire makes its flight
And whether it turns to the left or right,
How it pierced walls and exercised its sway
Beyond and then moved out and on its way.
Show me the course, skillful Calliope,
Who give men pleasure and tranquillity,
As to my final goal I run my race,
For it's marked out for me, and win first place
And gain the splendid crown of victory,
Spurred on by your support. Primarily,
The reason thunder shakes the azure sky
Is that clouds rush together way up high
As winds conflict. For where the sky is fair
There's no sound to be heard, but anywhere
The clouds are dense, the thunder's often loud.
Besides, there is less density in a cloud
Than in a stone or wood, but then again
More than in mist or flying smoke; for then,
Likes stones, they'd fall due to their gravity
Or else, like smoke, have no ability
To hold together or even contain
Within themselves cold snow or hail or rain.
They rumble, too, above us in the sky

As when in a great theatre one may spy
A canvas awning cracking in between
Its poles and beams, and sometimes it is seen,
When ripped, beneath strong winds to fly around,
As paper, when it's torn, makes that same sound,
Or hung-up clothes or sheets of paper snap
Whenever breezes ruffle them and flap
Them through the air. And clouds on certain days
Can't meet head-on but, side by side, will graze
Each other as they pass and make a din
That's long and dry, an irritation in
The ears, until each one of them has gone
From its confined abode and carries on.
Thus all things seem to tremble at the sound
Of thunder and the massive walls around
The wide-spread firmament are torn asunder
And leap apart when people hear that thunder;
Strong winds twist through the clouds summarily
And whirl round in that same locality
And gradually hither and yon compel
The clouds to form a void with a crusty shell;
Then when the winds lose their ascendancy,
The clouds are torn and terrifyingly
Explode. A tiny vesicle supplied
With air, when perforated on one side,
Can make a noise as loud, therefore no wonder!
There is another time when clouds may thunder –
When winds blow through them. For we often see

That clouds can act like branches variously
While looking violent as they sweep about;
Leaves rustle, branches creak, there is no doubt,
When blasts of North-West wind are blazing through
A teeming forest. It can happen, too,
That a fierce wind will rush unswervingly
Into a cloud and break it. We can see
Down here what it can do, for though it's less
Of a tempestuous nature, nonetheless
It wrenches lofty trees out of the ground.
Among the clouds, as well, waves can be found,
Which, as they break, growl out a roaring sound,
Which happens in deep rivers and around
The ocean's waves. Thunder, too, breaks out loud
When lightning's burning fire falls from one cloud
To another cloud, which, if, whenever it takes
The fire in, is soaked with water, makes
A dreadful noise, meanwhile immediately
Destroying it, just as similarly
A furnace's white-hot iron, when it's downed
In ice-cold water, makes a hissing sound.
To take this further, if the cloud were drier
When it received the lightning-stroke, the fire
Will loudly kindle it immediately,
As if the laurelled peaks were mightily
Attacked by wind-blown flames; for it's a fact
That nothing burns like laurel when it's cracked
By flame on Phoebus' altar in Delphi.

Again, a noise in huge clouds up on high
Is made by cracks of ice and hail; for when
The wind packs all of them together, then
The clouds are crushed together narrowly
And mixed with hail. Lightning, additionally,
Occurs when clouds clash and send seeds of flame
Abroad, for stones and steel will do the same
And strike out sparks of light. The reason why
The ear hears thunderclaps after the eye
Has seen the lightning is that things take longer
To reach the ear. To make your judgment stronger,
If you see someone cutting down a tree
Far off, before you hear the thud you see
The stroke; in the same way, before we hear
The thunder it's the lightning that is clear
To sight, though both occurred concurrently.
Thus with their rapid light clouds comparably
Tinge places, and hailstorms with a quivering burst
Will flash and dazzle. When a wind has first
Entered a cloud and, moving more and more,
Congealed it, as I have explained before,
It becomes hotter by its very speed,
Like all things else – a bullet will indeed
Melt when it's cast afar – and when it breaks
The black cloud, by its violent force it makes
Its seeds of fire squeeze out, the very same
That caused the winking flickerings of flame;
And then ensues the sound, which strikes the ears

Somewhat more tardily than what appears
Before the eyes. It is a proven fact
That this will take place when the clouds compact,
Piled one upon the other massively;
So do not be deceived because we see
From here how wide they are as they extend
Far upwards in the sky. So do but lend
Your eyes to how the clouds can be conveyed
Across the mountains where they are displayed
In heaps, pressed from above and lying still,
The winds wrapped all around them. Then you will
Behold that mass, able to recognize
The stone-built caves which, should a storm arise,
The winds fill up, complaining noisily
That by the clouds they're kept in custody,
Menacing like wild animals. This way
And that they growl there, hoping that they may
Find a way out as through the clouds they churn
The many seeds of fire and finally burn
And shatter them. Another reason why
The golden flowing flame can swiftly fly
To earth is that the clouds have to possess
Many seeds of fire. Thus when they're moistureless
Their colour mostly flames and shines. Indeed
From the sun's light they must gain many a seed,
Thus blushing red. So when the wind apace
Drives them into a tightly confined space,
They squeeze out seeds and make the flames shine bright.

And also when the clouds grow thin, there's light.
For when a wind that's tranquil has broadcast
Them here and there as they go gliding past,
The seeds that make the lightning have to fall,
And then the lightning makes no noise at all
And does not terrify. A thunderbolt
Has marks of heat burnt in and strokes that jolt
And dents that breathe foul sulphur; these are all
The marks of fire, not breezes or rainfall.
And often houses' roofs, additionally,
They set alight, assuming mastery
Over their rooms as well. This most refined
Of all the fires has nature so combined
With elements so rapid and so small
It can't be blocked by anything at all.
The powerful thunderbolt can pass straight through
A house's walls, as sounds and voices do,
And pierces stone and bronze and instantly
Melts bronze and gold, and by its energy
Wine will evaporate in a heartbeat
Yet keep the vessels safe, because the heat
With ease tempers the earthenware, and so
It makes it pervious and thus will flow
Into the jar itself, then far and near
Dissolves the wine's first seeds. This, it's quite clear,
The sun can't do for ages, even though
Its quivering blaze is powerful: for so
Rapid and strong it is. I'll tell you now

How thunderbolts have been produced and how
They have the energy to split and burn
Down towers with one stroke, to overturn
Houses, rip beams, topple to the ground
Monuments, kill men and animals all around,
And other things, and I will not delay
With promises. We must believe that they
Were first produced from thick clouds piled on high,
Since they were never issued when the sky
Is peaceful or when the clouds are lightly packed.
Indeed there is no doubt, for many a fact
Can prove it, since the clouds all mass together
When thunder happens, and we wonder whether
Hell's empty of all darkness everywhere,
Which now has filled the caverns of the air.
To such a degree beneath the hideous night
Of cloud there hangs the face of horrid fright,
As the tempest starts to forge her bolts. Besides,
Often a black cloud will affect the tides –
A pitchy flood, with darkness stuffed on high,
Falls down upon the waters from the sky
And brings with it a jet-black squall which teems
With thunderbolts and storms and winds and streams
Of flame, thus making people here below
Shiver with fear and run for shelter. So
We must believe the tempests have to surge
High over us, for clouds could not submerge
The earth with so much black unless each one

Was piled on many others that the sun
Would be blocked out. Nor could cascades of rain
Oppress us so that every stream and plain
Would swim in flood unless the sky were packed
With clouds piled high above us. So, in fact,
In such a case winds blow and fires flare
With rumblings and lightnings everywhere.
I said just now that hollow clouds contain
Many seeds of heat and therefore they must gain
Warmth from rays of the sun. And therefore, when
The wind collects them in one place and then
Has pressed out many seeds of torridness
And with that fire begins to coalesce,
The whirlwind goes into that narrow place
And turns itself about inside the space
And hones the thunderbolt. The wind indeed
Is kindled in two ways, first by its speed
And then by contact. The wind's energy
Heightens its heat and the intensity
Of the fire thrusts in, while the bolt, now fit
For action, as it were, will promptly split
The cloud, and then a rapid flame will fly
With flashing lights, and then, up in the sky,
A loud crash follows, and the firmament
Appears to overwhelm it as it's rent
Apart, then tremors in the sky assail
The earth and in the sky murmurings trail
And almost all the tempest with the jolt

Quivers, and roars come from the thunderbolt.
Then heavy rain ensues, and everywhere
There seems to be but rain throughout the air.
The torrent from that cloudburst and the blast
Of wind that it discharges is so vast,
When sound and flames fly forth. Sometimes, also,
A force of wind is stirred up and will blow
And fall upon a cloud that is replete
With a full-formed thunderbolt, whole and complete,
And, once the wind has burst it, instantly
A fiery vortex falls, a thing that we
Call thunderbolt. It can occur elsewhere
According to the force employed. And there
Have been times when a wind has been conveyed
Sans fire but has ignited as it made
Its lengthy trek through space, and, as it flew,
Lost certain bodies too large to pass through
The air equally well, and from the air
Itself scraped tiny ones which mingled there
With it, producing fire in their flight;
In the same way a bullet will ignite
And cast off many cold bodies in its course.
Fire is created by the very force
Of the blow, when cold winds strike. How can this be?
Well, when the wind has smitten violently,
Then from the winds heat elements may flow
As well as from that which received the blow;
When stone is struck by iron, out fire flies,

Where seeds do not the less homogenize
Since iron's cold. A thing, then, must be hit
And kindled by a thunderbolt if it
Is fit for flames. No wind may totally
Be cold if it's been sped down forcefully
From heaven, but if it's not first lit by flame
As it goes on its way, yet all the same
It must be warm and mixed with heat when it
Arrives. The swiftness and the heavy hit
Inflicted by the bolt (they usually
With such a fall move expeditiously)
Occurs because among the clouds a force
Is stirred up and embarks upon a course
Of rapid movement: when, subsequently,
The cloud can't hold back the intensity,
The force is pressed out and is therefore flown
Remarkably, like missiles which are thrown
From catapults. The elements are small
And smooth, however, so it's not at all
An easy task for something to impede
A thing with such a substance since with speed
It penetrates the narrow ways; and thus
It smoothly flies with rapid impetus
While rarely checked. All weights are naturally
Thrust downwards always; a velocity
Is added, though, when it inflicts a blow
As well and makes the first momentum grow
In weight, thus with more speed and violently

Disintegrating every entity
It meets that tries to bar it with delay.
And since it rushes from a long, long way,
It must keep getting faster as it grows
In strength by moving, stiffening the blows.
Its seeds are carried thus, as one may say,
Into one place as they roll on their way
And from the air itself it possibly
Draws bodies which provoke velocity
With blows. Nor does it cause any distress
To everything it meets in its progress,
Because the fire, being fluid, passes through
Their pores. And many it transfixes, too,
Because its very particles have lighted
Upon the points where everything's united.
It melts both bronze and gold immediately
Because it's made of bodies terribly
Minute and elements so smooth that they
Can very easily effect a way
Within and, once it's found its way inside,
Loosen all bonds. It is at autumntide
When all the regions of the firmament,
Set with its shining stars, is usually rent
With shaking all around, as is the earth,
And when the springtime brings its flowers to birth.
For in the cold fires fail, and when it's hot
The winds are lacking and the clouds are not
So dense. So when the temperature's between

The two, all causes of the bolt are seen
To be combined. For the year's choppy seas
Mingle together cold and heat – for these
Are both essential for a cloud to bring
A bolt to life – so that in everything
There's discord, and the wildly billowing air
With fires and winds engages everywhere.
So springtime is when warmth must say adieu
To cold and so a battle must ensue
Between those unlike things as they compete
In wild confusion; then when the last heat
Mixed with the early cold has come around,
Which we call autumn time, conflict is found
And bitter winters come into a fight
With summers. That's the reason why it's right
That they're called choppy seas. Thus it's no wonder
That in that season there is so much thunder,
With turbulent tempests stirred up in the air
Since all's confusion with well-matched warfare
On either side, as flames are coalesced
With winds and water. Thus you may digest
The nature of the thunderbolt and see
The role it plays through its intensity,
Not by unrolling scrolls to find a spell
And vainly search for signals that can tell
The gods' intent, to learn how fire came
And into which quarter it turned its flame,
And how it has pierced walls and how got back

And what's the harm inflicted by a crack
Of thunder. If the heavens are shaken by
The gods with dreadful noise up in the sky,
Who cast their fire at will, why don't they see
That when an execrable felony
Has been committed that they ought to clout
The man who did it, making him breathe out
Sulphurous flames, his breast pierced through, to show
A lesson to mankind? Why rather, though,
Should guiltless men in a tornado's flame
From heaven be burned? Why do they vainly aim
At deserts? Is it that they're practising
For other punishments and strengthening
Their muscles? Why allow a powerful jolt
Against the earth from Jupiter's thunderbolt?
And why does Jupiter himself not spare
That thunderbolt and cast it from the air
Upon his foes? Why does he never cast
His bolt on earth and sound his thunder-blast
From a clear sky? Does he instead descend
Into the clouds himself once they ascend
And only after that, when he's close by,
Direct his thunderbolt and see it fly?
Why does he strike the sea? And what has he
Against the waves, the vast immensity
Of water and the swimming plains? What's more,
If for us to be on the lookout for
His bolt is his desire, why does he not

Provide a way to see it when it’s shot?
But if his wish is unexpectedly
To crush us with his fire, why then does he
Strike from where we can see it, and thereby
Avoid it, and prepare up in the sky
The dark with rumblings and a dreadful din?
How is it you believe he can shoot in
Many directions at one time? Maybe
You’ll say it’s never done, but actually
It’s often done and must be done indeed
So that, as showers and rain pour down to feed
Many regions of the earth, many bolts will fall
All at the self-same time. Now, last of all,
Why does he smash shrines of divinities
And even his own illustrious territories?
Why crush many a fine-wrought effigy
And rob his statues of their majesty,
Inflicting dreadful wounds on them? And why
Is he wont to attack places on high?
Why is most of his fire seen upon
The mountain-tops? Well then, to carry on,
It’s easy from these thoughts to comprehend
How what the Greeks call *presteres* descend
Into the ocean. For occasionally
A kind of column drops into the sea,
Surrounding which the strong winds agitate
The waters, which begin to fulminate;
Ships caught in it were perilously cast

About. This happens when the furious blast
Of winds at times can’t burst the cloud it tries
To burst but thrusts it, giving it the guise
Of a column, to the billows of the sea
As though it were, degree by small degree,
Thrust by an arm and fist; and when the gust
Of wind tears it asunder, it is thrust
Out of the cloud and down into the sea,
And on the waves it bubbles wondrously.
The whirlwind twists and brings the cloud with it
And when the surface of the sea is hit
By that full cloud, the wind aggressively
Dives through the water, stirring up the sea,
And loudly makes it boil. Its vortex snakes
Into the clouds sometimes, where then it rakes
Their seeds together and then imitates
The Greek-named *presteres* as it rotates
Down from the sky. On landing, it’s dispersed
And violently vomits forth a burst
Of storm and whirlwind. But since it is rare
That this occurs, and also , here and there,
Mountains get in the way, more frequently
We see it on the wide and open sea
And there’s nothing above it but the sky.
The clouds amass together up on high
When many flying bodies suddenly
Meet up: they’re rougher and, to some degree,
Entangled yet can coalesce. These mould

Small clouds at first and yet they still can hold
Together and by combination grow
And then are borne upon the winds that blow
Until a savage tempest should arise.
The nearer are the mountains to the skies,
The more, through dusty clouds, will every peak
In that high place with dusky blackness reek
Since, when the clouds first form, before the eye
Sees them, so thin are they, they're carried high
By winds up to the peaks. Now they're amassed
In a much larger pack and can at last
Be seen, appearing simultaneously
To fly into the ether. We can see,
When we ascend a mountain, that the air
Abounds with windy breezes everywhere.
Besides, that many particles appear
Across the entire sea is made quite clear
When clothes are hung up on the shore and take
The sticky moisture in and therefore make
It likelier that many bodies may
Surge up together from the salty spray
And swell the clouds above, for we may see
That there exists a consanguinity
Between these moistures. We can see, as well,
From rivers and the earth itself a swell
Of clouds and steam arising, in this way
Exhaled like breath and bringing an array
Of darkness as they thus suffuse the sky,

Uniting as they gradually supply
The clouds; for heat drives through the firmament
And thus, packed close, a weave of clouds is blent.
The bodies that create this hullabaloo
Of clouds and flying storms enter the blue
From outside. For their number I have proved
Is infinite and shown how fast they're moved
In flight and that they instantaneously
Can travel through a space that cannot be
Imagined. No surprise, then, if a squall
And murkiness can in no time at all
Cover the sea and land with clouds so great,
Since all the elements can navigate
Their way through all the passages of the air
And through the breathing-channels everywhere
Around us. Listen now as I explain
How in the clouds the moistures of the rain
Increase together and how showers fall,
Sent down upon the earth. So, first of all,
There rises from the earth full many a seed
Of water with the clouds, you will concede,
From many things, and they together grow
As blood, sweat and all moisture we must know
Grows with our bodies. Often clouds will pull
Much water from the sea, like strands of wool,
As by the winds they're carried. In this way
From all the rivers water's snatched away
Into the clouds. And when from here and there

The seeds and clouds unite, while everywhere
They grow, the clouds, now packed together, try
To oust the moisture in two ways: they fly
Together, aided by the breezes' might,
And when a greater mass of clouds, packed tight,
Than usual is collected, from on high
They downwards press and make the showers fly
Abroad. And if these clouds are rarefied
By breezes or become somewhat untied,
Struck by the sun's great heat, they then secrete
Their rainy moisture, just as wax will heat
And melt above a fire and attain
Liquid. There's a fierce downpour of rain
When clouds are pressed together violently
Both by the wind and their own energy.
But when the seeds of water move, the rain
Is wont to be persistent and remain
For a long time, and storm-rack on storm-rack
And cloud on cloud from every region stack
While borne along and from above they stream
And everywhere the earth breathes back the steam.
When the sun shines amidst the gloomy squall
Against the clouds from which the showers fall,
A rainbow stands amid the murkiness.
There are some other things that coalesce
Inside the clouds and some which live and grow
Above us, winds and hail and frost and snow
And powerful ice which makes the waters freeze

And curb the eager rivers – how all these
Are made and why is easy to find out
And see in your mind's eye once you've no doubt
About all of the elements' qualities.
The reason for earthquakes' occurrences
Now learn. And, in the first place, you must know
That, as the sky above, the earth below
Is full of windy caverns which possess
Many lakes and pools and a great wilderness
Of rocks and cliffs. And so we must surmise
Beneath the earth's back many a river lies
Hidden that rolls its waters violently
And moves its rocks; for facts demand that she
Be everywhere herself. If this is so
And these things are attached to her below,
And each cavern with age deteriorates,
The upper earth trembles and oscillates
With some disaster; mountains start to fall,
And with the massive shock the tremblings crawl
Both far and wide at once – and well they may
Since buildings by the road tremble and sway
When lightweight wagons pass, which will also,
If a stone should jolt the wheels, as on they go,
Jump upwards. And sometimes when from the ground
After some time a giant mass is found
To roll into a lake, the earth also,
Jogged by the water's waves, moves to and fro,
Just as a vessel sometimes can't remain

Immobile if the water can’t refrain
From moving too. When winds beneath the ground
Desert one place and vehemently pound
Against the lofty caves, into that course
The headlong wind is making with great force
The earth will lean. The buildings, as they rise
In their construction up into the skies,
Incline, beams overhanging and prepared
To go. However, some people are scared
To think that for the great world’s population
A period of total desolation
Is waiting, though a looming mass they see
Over the earth. Yet if increasingly
The winds should blow, no force could hold the world
In limbo, keeping it from being hurled
Into perdition. But, because they wane
In turns, gain force, revive and blow again,
The earth makes idle threats more frequently
Than ever she effects calamity.
She makes a forward lean, then with a spring
Moves back again, meanwhile recovering
The equilibrium she had before.
And that’s how buildings totter, the top more
Than the foundation. When a blast of air
Or wind should blow – it doesn’t matter where,
Above the earth itself or underground –
And fly into the caves and whirl around
And loudly growl, the force it agitates

And drives it outwards as it lacerates
The earth and formulates a great crevasse.
At Syrian Sidon this once came to pass,
And Aegium, when an earthquake overthrew
Them with that force of air. Many others, too,
Have fallen thus, and many have sunk down
Into the ocean's depths and caused to drown
The populace. But should it not break out,
The air and wind are scattered all about,
Plague-like, through all the openings that lie
Beneath the earth, and tremors start thereby,
Just as we shake with cold unwittingly.
And therefore a two-fold anxiety
Affects the citizens, because they dread
The lofty houses and the caverns spread
Beneath the earth lest nature suddenly
Tears all asunder and confusingly
Opens her gaping jaws and tries to fill
The earth with ruin and all kinds of ill.
So let them all think that the earth and sky
Can't be corrupted and will never die;
Yet sometimes peril adds a goad of fear
That suddenly the earth will disappear
Beneath our feet. Men wonder why the sea
Is not increased in volume naturally,
For many waters flow into the tide
As many rivers run from every side.
Add wandering showers, too, and storms that fly

Onto all seas and lands out of the sky,
And all the ocean's springs: yet if you weigh
The sea with all things else you'll find that they
Amount to just one drop. Accordingly,
Don't think it so surprising that the sea
Does not increase. Besides, the sun's heat draws
A lot away from it – another cause
For doubt. Indeed we see wet garments dried
By the sun, and yet the seas spread far and wide
Beneath us, and yet even though the sun
Takes but a sip from it in any one
Location, yet a superfluity
He'll take away from that expanse of sea.
Much moisture's swept away from the sea's face
By winds, since we can often find no trace
Of wet in roads after one night and see
Soft mud massing in crusts. For recently
I've shown much moisture's taken away as well
By clouds descending on the ocean's swell:
Across the world they spray it everywhere
When it is raining and the breezes bear
The clouds along with them. Now finally,
The earth is porous, girdling the sea:
So, since into the sea the waters course,
The salt sea likewise must exude perforce
Onto the land. The pungency is strained,
And water oozes back till it's attained
Each river's source, whence in a moving mass

Over the earth once more it then may pass
Along its marked-out path. Now in what way
Mt. Etna breathes out fury I will say.
For it was no familiar devastation
Attending that fierce tempest's domination
In Sicily's fields, attracting all the eyes
Of neighbouring folk, who saw up in the skies
The regions of the heavens sparkling
And smoking as they stood there quivering
In panic that another tragedy
Was in the plans of nature. You must be
Diligent in these matters and survey
All quarters everywhere so that you may
Remember the profundity of all
We see and recognize how very small
A fraction of the world is just one sky –
Less than one man when he is measured by
The whole earth. If you keep this steadily
In mind, discerning it with clarity,
You'll cease to wonder at a multitude
Of things. For which of us is in the mood
For wonder if a fever should assail
Our bodies with its heat or we should ail
With something else? A foot will suddenly
Swell up or we will feel some agony
In teeth or eyes or that accursed thing
Erysipelas, which burns us, slithering
Across our limbs, because assuredly

Seeds do exist in many an entity,
And foul diseases from the earth and air
Are in sufficient numbers that they flare
Immeasurably. Therefore there's a supply
Of everything out of the earth and sky
From infinite space, we must believe, and so
The earth can quiver suddenly to and fro
And over land and sea can whirlwinds rush
And in abundance Etna's fires can gush
And heavens burst in a blaze, and heavily
Tempests can pour, when incidentally
The waters' seeds for that effect have massed.
"But much too huge is that tempestuous blast."
Alright, but any river seems to be
The largest to a man who formerly
Has never seen a larger; it's the same
With trees or men, and everyone may claim
That all things of all kinds that he may see
Are huge because they're bigger yet than he
Has seen before, though sky and sea and land
Are but a modicum if they are scanned
With all there is. But now I'll clarify
How Etna's flames are rouse that they might fly
Out of the furnaces. Primarily
The mountain's hollow, held up principally
By flinty caverns, where there's wind, which air
Invigorates by flying everywhere.
And when the wind's grown hot and savagely

Heated the rocks in its vicinity,
The earth as well, it darts without delay
Quick flames, rises and makes its fiery way
Into the mountain's throat. The fires are,
Along with all their sparks, scattered afar
So that their thick, black smoke may emanate
As well as boulders of a wondrous weight.
You may be sure such is the energy
That air possesses. Furthermore, the sea
Around much of the mountain's roots will break
Its waves and, with a sucking sound, will make
Its surf recede; caves from this sea, below
The earth, into the maw of the mountain go.
Wind mixed with water, then, we must admit,
Enters, the facts of the case compelling it
To pierce through from the ocean whence it came
And to extinguish and lift high the flame
And cast up rocks and raise out of the sea
Sand-clouds. Upon the very apogee
Are craters, as they're called in Sicily
(We call them throats or mouths). Additionally,
There are a lot of things for which we name
Not one but many causes; all the same,
One of them is the true cause: for, let's say,
You see a man's corpse lying far away –
Perhaps you think you should enumerate
All causes of his death lest you don't state
The actual one. You could not prove a blade,

The cold, poison or some disease had made
The final blow, but we will surely find
The cause of death was something of this kind.
In many other things like views we state.
The Nile's the only river in full spate
Near summer. For it irrigates the land
Mid-season since the stream is forced to stand
By northerly winds which at the mouth appear
(They're called Etesian at that time of year):
They blow against it, hold it and impel
The waters to the channel. It is well
Beyond a doubt that those sharp blasts are rolled
From all the polar stars of northern cold
And blow against the current. From that land
Of heat, the Nile flows south where there are tanned
Black tribes baked by the sun. Maybe, as well,
Great mounds of sand pile up against the swell
And block the mouth: the winds stir up the sea,
Which drive the sand inward; accordingly
The outlet of the river is more barred:
Thus the descending waters find it hard
To flow. There may be also at its head
More rain then when the Etesian winds have sped
To drive the clouds together there. You may
Be sure, when to the regions of noonday
They're pushed, the clouds are violently compressed,
At last collected on a mountain crest.
Perhaps the river grows straight from the heart

Of Ethiopian peaks, whence clouds depart
Out to the plains through the intensity
Of the sun's melting rays. Listen to me
As the Avernian regions and their lakes
I tell of. First of all, the region takes
Its name from the fact that it's a dreadful threat
To birds which, flying over it, forget
How they should use their wings and, slackening
Their sails, fall through the ether, plummeting,
Their necks limp, into water or the ground,
As nature wills it. This region is found
Near Cumae, where the mountains up on high
Reek, with rank sulphur filled and shrouded by
Hot springs. In Athens there's another place,
High on the citadel, where you may face
Tritonian Pallas' shrine, the fostering
Athene, whither no crow will take wing,
Not even when an offering is there
Upon the altar. They take so much care
To flee, not, as the Grecian bards have sung,
Due to their vigil – no, its quality
Itself repels them. Also history
Says such a place in Syria is found –
As soon as beasts set foot upon the ground,
It makes them fall down heavily as though
Slain sacrifices to the gods below.
But these are nature's work – where they arose
And what produced them everybody knows.

And so the gates of Orcus cannot be
Within those regions and no deity
Of Hell can draw souls into the domain
Of Acheron, just as some folk maintain
Swift stags can draw a serpent from its lair
By breathing. Logic, you must be aware,
Proves this is false. I strive to speak what's true.
First, as I've frequently explained to you,
There are so many different entities
Upon the earth, and several of these
(Like food) aid life, but many strike us dead
With maladies. As I have also said,
Each animal has a very different need
From others for the life that it must lead,
For every one is structured differently.
A many a pernicious entity
Enters the ears and nose, rough to the touch
And noxious; many, too, are very much
Not to be touched, looked at or tasted. You
May see how many things harm humans, too.
First, there is cast a shade so threatening
From certain trees that they can often bring
On headaches should you lie there on the ground.
On Helicon's mountain- peaks there can be found
A tree whose vile stench kills a fellow flat
If he should smell its flower. You must know that
The earth has many kinds of seeds which she
Keeps hold of and then mingles variously

And passes on. A new-extinguished light
Offends the nose and overpowers quite
At once a man who customarily
Foams at the mouth and falls. The heavily-
Scented castor makes a woman fall
Asleep again as she lets go of all
Her dainty work, if she has smelt it when
She had her monthly period. And then,
A lot of things loosen the limbs and shake
The spirit. Once again, if you should take
Too long a hot bath after a full meal
You may, while still immersed, easily keel
Over. The heavy fumes of charcoal easily
Can creep into the brain lest formerly
One drinks some water. Should a fever take
Possession of a man, wine's smell will make
A corpse of him. Do you not see that Earth
Itself has to our sulphur given birth,
And with its filthy odour asphalt grows
In lumps together. Then again, when those
Who mine silver and gold, examining
The earth below us, o how everything
Reeks in Scaptensula! Those mines of gold –
What kinds of devilry do they all hold
And breathe out! And the men – what kind of hue
Do they take on! What do they look like! You
Must see and hear how soon their death will be,
Their forces spent, since of necessity

They must keep working. All the streams breathed out
From the earth go forth and wander all about
The open sky. Avernus thus must send
Its deadly power up in the sky to end
The lives of birds, contaminating part
Of heaven: thus when birds should chance to dart
Thither, they're caught by poison they can't see
And maybe fall straight down unswervingly
To where the breath flew up so that same breath
May make the coup de grâce and clinch their death.
It seems to cause a giddiness at first,
But afterwards, when they have surely burst
Into those poison springs, their life as well
Must be spewed forth, because within that Hell
Much evil lurks. Sometimes the power there
That drives that exhalation parts the air
Between the birds and earth so that a space
Is left there. So when they fly to that place,
Their wings lack power and halt immediately
And on both sides they waste their energy.
They can't count on their wings and so descend
To earth and in near-empty space they send
Their souls to roam abroad through every pore
As there they lie. Well-water, furthermore,
Grows colder in the summer, since the ground
Is rarefied by heat and spreads around
Into the air what seeds it might possess.
The more the earth has lost some fieriness,

The colder grows the water that's concealed
Within the earth. Then when the earth's congealed
And pulverized by cold and coalesces,
Through that congealing into the walls it presses
What heat it has. There is a spring, they say,
Near Ammon's shrine that's cold during the day
And hot at night. This spring excessively
Men wonder at; some hold the theory
That the earth boils with the sun's fieriness
When night with terrifying gloominess
Has spread the earth. But this opinion
Is far from sensible. For, when the sun
Can't heat up water, though it blazes so,
How is it possible, when it's below
Earth's mass, that it can make the water boil,
Soaked with its heat, beneath that compressed soil,
Especially since its warmth can't adequately
Pass through a wall? How, then? Assuredly
Because the ground's more pervious right there
About the fountain than it is elsewhere.
A lot of seeds of fire are around
The water, so when night has quashed the ground
With dewy waves, the earth will frigid grow
At heart, contracting. In this way, as though
Pressed by a hand, it sends into the spring
What seeds of fire it has, engendering
The water's heat. When the earth is agitated
By the sun's rays and thus attenuated,

The seeds return to their original source:
Thus through the earth the water's warmth may course.
And that's the reason why the spring is cold
In the light of day. Besides, the water's rolled
About by the rays of the sun, and the tremulous
Heat in daylight makes it pervious,
And that's the reason why it ousts each seed
Of fire in its store, just as indeed
Water sends out the cold that it possesses
From time to time so that it deliquesces
The ice. There is a cold spring which, when tow
Is held above it, frequently will throw
A flame which catches fire instantly;
A torch amid the waters similarly
Sparkles and shines wherever it's impelled
By winds, since many seeds of fire are held
In water, and from down in the earth below
There must be bodies of fire which rise and go
All through the entire spring, into the air
Exhaled, though there are not sufficient there
To heat the spring. Besides, there is a force
That makes them break out suddenly and course
Along the water, later gathering
Above. This is exactly like the spring
Of Aradus in the sea, which splashes out
Sweet water but the brine that flows about
The spring they keep away. Again, the sea
In many others spots treats bounteously

Parched sailors, for among the brine they spew
Sweet water. Thus these seeds can burst out through
This spring; and when upon some tow they meet
Together, sticking to the torch's heat,
They blaze up suddenly because the tow
And floating torches, all of them aglow,
Have seeds of fire, too. Is it not true
That when beside a burning night-light you
Have placed a wick that you have first snuffed out,
The wick is kindled once again without
Touching the flame? The torch reacts the same.
And many other things become a flame
Far from the heat, before the fire is there
And drenches them. This, therefore, we must dare
To think that this occurs in that spring, too.
To pass on, then, I will review for you
How there exists a stone that can attract
Iron, established by some natural act
(This stone the Greeks call 'magnet', since it came
From the Magnesian region), and its fame
Awes men because a chain quite frequently
Has small rings hanging from it: one may see
Sometimes a few suspended in a string,
Some five or more of them all dangling
And swaying in the breeze, one from another
Hanging beneath, and each learns from its brother
The stone's attracting force, which through and through
Discharges and prevails. But until you

Account for things of this sort, you must set
A deal of principles before you get
Your answer, and you must in your pursuit
Be patient as you deeply delve to root
It out. Your heedful ears and mind, therefore,
I'm anxious to elicit all the more.
In the first place, from everything we see
There must be bodies flowing constantly,
Discharged and scattered, which assail our eyes,
Exciting vision. Constant odour flies
From things, rivers are cold, the sun has heat,
The sea-waves spray as chillingly they beat
Upon the sea-walls. Through the ear a spate
Of noises ooze, which never will abate.
We have a salty taste when by the sea
We chance to take a walk; similarly
When wormwood and pure water coalesce
Before our eyes we feel a bitterness.
From all things certain qualities emanate
And then in all directions dissipate.
It's constant, since we feel it constantly,
Since it is always given us to see
All things and smell them, and to hear them, too.
How porous bodies are I'll tell to you
Once more, which in my first book I made plain.
Although it is important to attain
Knowledge of many subjects, with none more
Important than the one I'll now explore,

We must accept there's nothing that we see
But bodies mixed with void. Primarily,
In caves the rocks above with sweat ooze out,
The moisture dripping down with many a gout;
We sweat, too, and our beards grow, and the hair
Appears upon our bodies everywhere.
Food enter all our veins to boost and feed
Our frames, even the extreme parts indeed,
Like nails. Both cold and heat we feel to go
Through bronze: silver and gold we feel also
When we hold teeming cups. Voices flit through
Stone walls, where cold and odour trickle, too,
As well as fire's heat, which, too, can pierce
Through iron, for its strength is very fierce.
And when heaven's corselet girds us all around,
The power of diseases has been found,
Which comes in from without; and naturally
Storms rise from earth and sky, subsequently
Withdrawing thither, since it's very clear
That there is no non-porous texture here
On earth. Moreover, not all bodies hurled
From things have been donated in this world
The same force on the senses, nor are they
Germane to everything in the same way.
Firstly, the sun bakes earth and makes it dry
But melts the ice, compelling up on high
The snow to thaw, and wax it liquefies
And with its burning heat it mollifies

Both bronze and gold, and yet contrarily
It shrivels hides and flesh. Additionally,
Water will harden iron when one takes
It from the fire, but yet again it makes
Soft hides and flesh, once hardened by the heat.
To nanny-goats the olive is as sweet
As if it literally were drizzling
With nectar and ambrosia; and yet no thing
Has bitterer leaves for man. Again, pigs flee
From marjoram oil and each variety
Of unguent, for what they find poisonous
Sometimes appears to give new life to us.
Though mud is hateful to us, nonetheless
They find it pleasurable and obsess
In rolling in it. But there's something yet
That I think best to say before I set
About my proper theme. Since we can see
Many pores in different things, then they must be
Endowed with their own natures and, as well,
Their own directions, because, truth to tell,
All beasts have different senses - each discerns
The object proper to it, and one learns
That sound and taste and smell can penetrate
With different senses. One can infiltrate
Itself through stone, another one can pass
Through wood, another gold, another glass
Or silver, since through glass images flow,
Through silver warmth, while one thing's seen to go

More quickly than another, although they
Yet make their journey by the self-same way.
The nature of the paths assuredly
Produces this eventuality,
Because it's modified in waves galore,
As I have shown a little while before,
Due to each nature and how they're created.
So when these principles have been instated,
Prepared for us and laid out thoroughly,
What's left is simple, since we easily
Are able to deduce the explanation
And show the reason for this gravitation.
Firstly, there must be many seeds which flow
Out of this stone, or a current that must blow
And beat away the air which lies between
Iron and stone, and when this space has been
Made empty and there is an ample place
Inside, the iron's seeds enter this space
And fall together, whose result must be
That the ring pursues them, passing totally
Inside in the same way. There is no one thing
Whose seeds are more connected, gathering
Themselves, than iron which is chill and rough.
What I've revealed, therefore, is proof enough
That there are many bodies which exude
From iron which aren't able to intrude
Into the void unless he ring goes, too:
It does indeed do this and follows through

Until it’s reached the stone where it will cling,
Attached by hidden links. That very thing
Occurs in every part: where there’s a space,
Above or on the side, the bodies race
Into the void; by blows from everywhere
Are they impelled, and up into the air
They cannot rise at will. And, furthermore,
As soon as the air is rarefied before
The ring, it’s driven forward by that air
Behind, which buffets all things everywhere.
It drives the iron then since on one side
There is a space wherein it may abide.
This air I speak of is insidious,
Piercing the iron’s many holes, and thus
Reaches the particles, and then it thrusts
It forward as a ship’s moved by the gusts
Of wind when lacking sails. All things have air
Since they are pervious, and everywhere
It hems and joins them all. The air, therefore,
Hidden inside the iron’s every pore,
With restless movement ever agitated,
Then beats the ring which thus is animated:
It’s carried to where it before had thrown
Itself towards the void. From this same stone
It goes sometimes, because it’s wont to flee
But then to follow, too, alternately.
I’ve seen the Samothracian iron dance,
When all the iron filings madly prance

Within a bronze bowl where the stone was laid
Beneath: so keen the iron was to evade
The stone. And when the bronze has come between,
There's chaos, since its current's surely seen
To go ahead and thoroughly obtain
Possession of the iron's pores. Again,
The current comes and finds the iron replete
And now is quite unable to repeat
Its swim across it. Then accordingly
It must assail the iron: equally
It spews while through the bronze it sets about
Moving throughout the bronze that which without
The bronze it often sucks back. Do not be
Surprised the flow has not the ability
To drive other things: some stand firm by their weight,
Like gold, some are so easy to permeate
That things flow through them unrestrainedly
And cannot be propelled – wood's seen to be
A substance of that kind. So iron, then,
Stands in between the two of them, and when
Some tiny bodies of bronze should through it go,
The magnet stones propel it by their flow.
These properties, though, are not so discrete
That there aren't many more I can repeat
To you: for with each other they agree,
But nothing else. To start with, you may see
That only mortar can cement a stone
And wood is joined by glue of bull alone

So that the grain of boards will often gape
Before the glue loosens its hold. The grape
Mingles its juice with water from a spring,
And yet there cannot be such mingling
With pitch or olive-oil. The sea-shell's hue
Unites with wool and stays thus, even if you
Attempt to renovate it with the sea,
Even if it plies its waves entirely
To wash it out. Just one thing can cement
Two gold things; tin's the only element
Uniting bronze to bronze. So many more
Examples can be found – and yet wherefore?
You must not use so long and devious
A method, and I myself should not discuss
This theme laboriously. For to embrace
Many things but briefly is the perfect case:
When textures of all entities coincide
That empty places here become allied
With full ones there, and thus contrariwise,
That is the best approach. We may surmise
That certain parts are linked with couplings
As if they had been tied with hooks and rings,
Just like with iron and stone apparently.
Now I'll explain the cause of malady,
How it amasses and with sudden breath
Assails mankind and beasts and causes death.
First, many seeds, as I have shown before,
Support us, but there must be many more

That fly around and bring death and disease,
And if by chance or misadventure these
Amass and thus the heavens have been cast
Into unrest, the air receives a blast
Of sickness. These diseases bring their scourge
Either from without as down the sky they surge,
Like clouds or mist, or gather frequently
From earth when through the damp it's come to be
Putrescent, struck by an unseasonable blow
Of sun and rain. Do you not see, also,
That those who travel far from home will be
Affected by the weather's novelty?
For what a difference must we understand
Between the climate of the British land
And that of Egypt, where the world's pole's bent
Somewhat? Cannot we see how different
Is Pontus from Cadiz and from those places
Where tribes of people dwell with blackened faces?
And as we see four climates so diverse,
Four winds, four quarters of the universe,
We find folk vary in their looks and hue,
Subject to different diseases, too.
For instance there's elephantiasis,
Found by the Nile in middle-Egypt – this
Is not found elsewhere. Attica is found
To have affliction of the feet, while round
Achaea there's infection of the eyes.
Hence various different maladies arise

In various parts: it’s the variety
Of airs that causes this. Accordingly,
Whenever a sky that’s alien to us all
Begins to move, a dangerous air will crawl
In snail-like fashion, like a cloud or mist,
And brings chaos wherever it may list,
Compelling change; and often, when our sky
It enters, it corrupts it and thereby
It makes it like itself and therefore strange
To us. Thus when this pestilential change
Falls on the waters or upon the fields
Where corn is grown and other produce yields
The nourishment required by beasts and men
Or even hovers in the air, and when
We breathe the air mixed with it, likewise we
Must then absorb it, too. Similarly
The pestilence can give a fatal shock
To cattle and distemper to a flock
Of sluggish sheep. No matter if we take
A trip to places which are apt to make
Us sick or choose a different atmosphere
Elsewhere or if a tainted sky’s brought here
By Nature or she gives us something we
Aren’t used to and has the ability
To harm us! Such a cause of maladies
Occurred once in the principalities
Of Cecrops, poisoning the countryside:
It made the roads a desert as men died

In cities. Starting well within the land
Of Egypt, far across the air it spanned
The swimming plains, at length falling upon
All the inhabitants of Pandion,
Who then were visited by malady
With death assailing them extensively.
They first felt burning heat inside the head
And with that fire the eyes were flaming red.
The throat was black within and it would bleed
While ulcers clogged the passage to impede
The voice; the tongue, interpreter of the head,
Was weak with pain and also freely bled,
Heavy and rough, then, having now possessed
The throat, this dreadful plague filled up the chest,
Flooding the mind, and all life's bulwarks reeled
Indeed. The patient's breathing, too, revealed
A foul stench, like the penetrating smell
Of corpses left unburied. Then, as well,
The mind grew faint, being about to go
Across death's threshold. This oppressive woe
Rubbed shoulders with piercing anxiety
Mingled with howls and grievous threnody.
Often the patient retched through day and night,
The limbs and muscles cramped, making him quite
Past weariness. And yet one could not see
Upon the frame any torridity,
But merely warmth, which showed a vivid red
As though with ulcers, as it may be said,

It burned, as erysipelas can glide
Across the limbs. And yet men blazed inside:
A red-hot flame within the gut would burn,
And nothing light or slender could you turn
To use to help them, only wind and cold.
Some with this plague in cooling rivers rolled.
Many fell into wells, which they struck first
With gaping mouths, all drenched with parching thirst –
A water's flood seemed but a modicum.
Fatigued, they could not find one thing to numb
The pain. Below her breath, in silent fright,
Medicine muttered, since within her sight
They rolled their staring eyes repeatedly,
Sleepless and cursed by their infirmity.
Many other signs of death I'll mention here:
A mind unsettled due to grief and fear,
A gloomy brow, a look that's mad and wild,
Ears that are also troubled and beguiled
By droning, pants emitted frequently
And deep breaths uttered intermittently,
Dank sweat down from their features trickling
And thin, salt, yellow spittle issuing
With effort from the throat. Relentlessly
The hands twitched and the limbs shook; gradually
A bitter cold would creep up from the toes,
The nostrils were compressed, the tip of the nose
Grew sharp, the eyes were sunken in the head,
The temples hollow and, as of one dead,

The hard skin cold, the forehead showing strain,
The mouth agape. Very soon in death's domain
They lay. Upon the eighth day or, at most,
The ninth, those wretched folks gave up the ghost.
If one of them had happened to evade
Destructive death, yet later they were made
To undergo foul ulcers and to bear
Black discharge from the bowels – waiting there
Was waste and death, or else corrupted blood
Would issue from choked nostrils in a flood
Which pained the head, and through this ran the store
Of human strength and substance. Furthermore,
He who evaded the foul flux of blood
Yet found this plague could cascade in a flood
Into the limbs and sinews, even veer
Into the genitals. Some with a strong fear
Of death would go on living even though
They'd cut their penis off, and some would go
The rest of life without their hands and feet;
Some lost their eyes; their fear was so complete.
And there were some who lost their memory
And did not know their own identity.
Though piles of bodies lay upon the ground
Unburied, tribes of birds and beasts would bound
Away to dodge the stench or, tasting, faint
And die a speedy death due to the taint.
Yet back then no-one hardly saw a bird
And from the forests scarcely came a herd

Of gloomy beasts. Most grew weak with disease
And died. Dogs were among the first of these,
Those faithful beasts, who, scattered all about
Upon the roads, reluctantly let out
Their final breath, their lives twisted away.
And there were struggles when a vast array
Of funerals with no mourners went around
The streets. No solid remedy was found,
For what gave some the strength to breathe the air
And look up at the sky gave dark despair
To others. In predicaments like these,
The worst thing was when one found the disease
Had felled him, knowing death was looming, he
Would lie with saddened heart despondently
And give up his existence then and there.
No-one at any time or anywhere
Cease to pass on this greed plague, as though
They were but sheep and hornèd herds; and so,
Chiefly, the dead were piled up in a heap:
For anyone who made attempts to keep
Watch on the sick, although they had a dread
Of death and love of life, would soon be dead,
Afflicted by a fatal carelessness,
Themselves deserted, plagued by helplessness.
But those who stayed at hand would perish there
From the disease and labour that they'd bear
Through duty and the voice of those who'd plead
As wearily they watched, mingled indeed

With dying wails. It was this kind of death
That noble people at their final breath
Would meet. Now by this time the shepherds all,
The drovers, ploughmen, to, began to fall.
In the back-corners of their huts they'd lie,
Assailed by poverty and doomed to die.
One sometimes saw a total family
Lifeless, the mother, father, progeny.
The countryside, though, had no less despair
Than Rome whither there came from everywhere
A mob of sickly farmers – they would press
In buildings and outside, where death's distress
Pied up the corpses. Many a sick man went
Out to the highways, by his great thirst sent,
And by the fountains with Silenus' head
They now, choked with their hankering, lay dead.
And all along those highways one might see
Many a half-dead body raggedly
Abused with negligence, near buried quite
With vile and obscene filth – a dreadful sight!
Wrapped up in rags and well-nigh putrefied,
With nought but skin upon their bones, they died.
The holy temples of the deities
Had Death becrammed with all its carcasses,
Each altar filled with corpses everywhere,
The shrine of which the sacristans took care
And filled with guests. There was no admiration
For worship now, for all the tribulation

Suppressed it. Burial rites, which evermore
Had been observed for many years before,
Was banished. Everyone was filled with dread
And, as he may, would bury his own dead.
For sudden urgency and poverty
Caused awful acts, as people piercingly
Shrieked out as on a stranger's pyre they lay
Their kin: the torch once placed beneath it, they
Indulged in bloody brawls rather than leave
Their loved one, and then they would weep and grieve
As they went home. A multiplicity
Would take themselves to bed in misery.
And there was nobody whom one would know
Untouched by death and malady and woe.