De rerum natura / On the Nature of Things

Parallel Classics Series

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Volume 1

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De rerum natura / On the Nature of Things

Parallel Latin and English Edition



Timothy A. Lee Publishing

De rerum natura / On the Nature of Things: Parallel Latin and English Edition

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Series Preface

When it comes to accessing ancient writings in the current digitally dominant age the task can seem both simple and overwhelming. Simple, in the sense, that most everything is now readily available digitally through some searching. Overwhelming, in the sense, that a newcomer to this world may struggle with deciding how to begin. An additional issue is the fact that with the plethora of digital availability, there is minimal affordable access to physical copies, especially for those not connected to an academic library. The Parallel Classics Series aims to provide an answer to these issues.

The first issue of simplicity is answered by providing both the original language of the text (Greek or Latin) in parallel (either on facing pages or side-by-side on a page) with an English translation. This will enable a reader who may not have an advanced familiarity with the language to be able to read and engage with the text on that deep level through easy reference to the original text. The second issue of overwhelm is answered through including a brief Introduction and "Suggested Reading" list for each text. The final issue of affordability is answered with maintaining low cost for these volumes so as to help students and others with less financial flexibility be able to acquire a physical copy of these texts for their enjoyment and study.

In this inaugural volume of this series, we present Lucretius' De Rerum Natura. It is commonly underappreciated for the beauty and power that it contains. It is widely considered to be the pinnacle of Golden Age Latin with its elegant rhythmic expositions of the natural world seeking to assuage fears. Due to the awkward nature of translating poetry, this volume has both Latin and English on each page. The purpose is to help lines better align so that readers can more easily reference between languages as they read. What Lucretius could say in 3 or 4 lines commonly takes 5 or more in English. Also, the original English translation included here was not particularly made with a project like this in mind as was the Loeb Classical Library volume. Unlike the Loeb volume, this volume maintains the English in poetic verse form to help maintain the mindset that one is reading poetry and not prose.

Nathan Alexander Scott (Series Editor)

Introduction

By Nathan Alexander Scott

Lucretius, Poet Philosopher

Few figures in history have had such an extensive impact while yet, paradoxically, remaining mostly unknown as Titus Lucretius Carus. There is nearly nothing preserved about his life. The scholarly consensus is that he was born around 98 BC, died around 50 BC, and lived in Italy. One of the few accounts of Lucretius is found in Jerome's Latin translation/edition of Eusebius' *Chronicon*: "Titus Lucretius was born a poet: who afterwards was turned to madness by a love-potion. He wrote some books during the intervals of his insanity, which afterwards Cicero edited. He died at his own hand when he was forty-four years old."[1] It is important to note that scholars only accept Jerome's dating as accurate, whereas his account of Lucretius' madness and suicide were likely influenced by Jerome's distaste for classical philosophy (cf. Jerome's *Ep.* 22.30). Despite this sad gap in the historical record, Lucretius wrote a powerful poem that has survived nearly entirely. Overall, surprisingly, Lucretius' poem has been well preserved and has had a powerful impact on Western culture, particularly since its rediscovery in 1417 by the humanist scholar Poggio Bracciolini.

Lucretius was an Epicurean who wrote his poem as a way to teach and promote Epicurean philosophy.[2] He likened his use of beautiful music as a means to teach difficult truths about nature and life to a doctor who puts honey on the lip of a cup of medicine to entice a child to receive their cure (*DRN* 1.935-50). Perhaps Mary Poppins drew inspiration from Lucretius when she sang: "for a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down." The ultimate aim for Lucretius' composition was to help people understand

[1] Epicureanism was a philosophy founded by Epicurus (341-271 BC), that focused on the pursuit of pleasure as the ultimate good. True pleasure meant removal of pain and moderation in physical enjoyment, because excess only causes unpleasantness. It also primarily focused on mental pleasures of deeper understanding of nature, humanity, and community. They were unique among early groups for egalitarian practices, i.e., inclusion of women in leadership and education, as well as radical social pacifism (one of the reasons early Christians were commonly misidentified as Epicureans). The ultimate aim was to overcome fear, specifically fear of death and the gods. Thus, one of the primary Epicurean axioms is "Death is nothing to us" (*Diog. Laert.* 10.139.2). With fears assuaged, one could achieve *ataraxia/eudaimonia* (peaceful calm). If one could achieve ataraxic peace, then anything that life throws at you would not be a cause of distress.

[2] In the latter poem Virgil made extensive use of Lucretius' poem. For discussions on this see Philip Hardie, *Lucretian Receptions: History, The Sublime, Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Monica R. Gale, *Virgil on the Nature of Things: The Georgics, Lucretius and the Didactic Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

the *naturae species ratioque* ("the appearance and reason of nature," *DRN* 1.148; 2.61; 3.93; 6.41). In other words, to provide a means by which people can understand reality and thus assuage fears. Like a person standing on solid ground while watching a ship on the sea struggling to make its way through the storm to the safe harbor, so too the wise Epicurean finds solace in the *templa serena* ("serene temples") built by the wise ones (*DRN* 2.1-8). As opposed to the foolish masses who strive vainly after wealth, prestige, and ways to pacify the supposed wrath of the gods (*DRN* 2.9-54). "O miserable human minds, O blind hearts!" (*DRN* 2.14). With a proper understanding of nature, as per Lucretius' message, one can achieve peace and tranquility in life to endure even the most atrocious of tragedies such as the great Athenian plague (*DRN* 6.1138-1286).

Lucretius' Poem

The *De Rerum Natura* was written in epic poetic verse, which may cause confusion about its contents and genre. The genre of Epic Poetry traces back to Homer with his *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The genre is noticeable through the poetic meter called Dactylic Hexameter. This structure entails that each line has six "feet" (similar to the modern musical term "bars") and each "foot" is either a "Dactyl" (one long and two short) or a "Spondee" (two long). Each foot thus fills the space of four counts (or beats), and each line might have anywhere from twelve to eighteen syllables while always filling the musical space of twenty-four beats. This form of poetry was typically used for singing about epic stories (like Homer's poems), so why did Lucretius use this genre for a poem about nature? This would be comparable to beginning a modern physics textbook with "Once upon a time…" As odd as this sounds, Lucretius was drawing from a long-standing tradition called "Didactic Epic Poetry" which dates back to Homer's contemporary, Hesiod, in his two Didactic Epic Poems, *Works and Days* and *Theogony*. The famous Augustan poet Virgil made use of both types of Epic Poetry, utilizing traditional Epic in his *Aeneid* and Didactic Epic in his *Georgica*.[3] The aim of this type of poetry is to teach (thus why it is called "Didactic"), but it aims to attract students through entertaining means like exciting music. Lucretius' poetry, as much as it is covering topics that may seem boring and dry, is rich and exciting. There is good reason that Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* is hailed as the pinnacle of Golden Age Latin.

The Readers of the Poem

From Virgil and Ovid, through Seneca, Pliny (Elder and Younger), Quintilian, Plutarch, and Apuleius, secular Roman writers (both Greek and Latin) have found Lucretius'

[3] For some excellent discussions on various early readers of Lucretius' poem, see the essays in George Kazantzidis, ed., *Lucretian Receptions in Prose*, vol. 167, Trends in Classics (De Gruyter, 2024). Also note Susanne Gatzemeier's book, *Ut ait Lucretius: Dei Lukrezrezeption in der lateinischen Prosa bis Laktanz* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013). Gatzemeier provides an excellent discussion on early Latin reception of Lucretius up until the early fourth century. Also note my own essays (forthcoming) on Cyprian of Carthage using Lucretius in his *De Mortalitate* and Augustine using Lucretius in his *De Genesi ad Litteram*.

poem influential both positively and negatively.[4] Even early Christians found the poem worth engaging. Much of the use seems to revolve around how to understand nature, i.e., Lucretius became a prominent source on natural science. Despite the overt arguments opposing divine providence, Christian figures still found the explanations of the natural sciences compelling and able to work in the framework of: "this helps us understand *how* God governs nature." During the Carolingian Renaissance (8th and 9th centuries), there seems to have been a reduction in Lucretian references as if the poem was no longer being read. Until, in 1417, when Poggio Bracciolini encountered it while surveying texts in a small Monastery. There are now records of the poem having been read in the 12th century and other parts of the late-medieval period, but the fact is that the poem did drop, seemingly suddenly, to near obscurity in the 9th century.[5] The re-discovery in the 15th century had a major impact on Western philosophy and possibly contributed to the growth of the already percolating ideas that led to the Christian Protestant Reformation. It certainly is the foundational influence for the development and rise of Atheistic scientism.[6] Though, most of the negativity around Lucretius seems to be based on a misunderstanding of Epicurean ethics, namely, hyper-hedonism. It is assumed (wrongly) that Lucretius promoted debauchery and the pursuit of physical pleasures. Rather, Lucretius' ethics and arguments are complex and, in true Epicurean form, focused on the value of mental pleasure over physical indulgence. Epicurus said (in his *Kuriai Doxai*): "It is not possible to live pleasantly without [also living] intelligently and admirably and justly, neither is it possible to live intelligently and admirably and justly without [also living] pleasantly" (*Diog. Laert.* 10.140.5). Lucretius summarized, "it is not possible to live well without a purified heart" (*DRN* 5.18). The primary aim of Epicurean philosophy for Lucretius was to lead people to find peaceful calm to be able to endure the random complexity of life. In that understanding, Lucretius has guided many writers throughout the past 2000+ years. This poem has had a deep impact on the Western world, through traces of influence in Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbs, Friederich Nietzche, and many others. Anyone interested in most any aspect of philosophical reasoning and/or history of science would be remiss to pass over this powerful Didactic Epic Poem.

Breakdown of the Poem

The *De Rerum Natura* was composed in six books, with the first three being approximately 1100 lines each and the latter three 12-1400 lines each. The poem as a whole begins with a beautiful scene of new life with "nurturing-mother" Venus, "the desire of men and gods" the "Generatrix of the Romans" (*Aeneadum genetrix – DRN* 1.1-2).

[4] Alison Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence* (Harvard University Press, 2010), 1–3.

[5] I.e., "if we can explain it, God could not have been involved" is a central Lucretian/Epicurean argument.

[6] Monica R. Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 39, 70–71, 226. Gale says, Nature "explains to the man who is unwilling to die that his dissolution is necessary for the birth of future generations" (p.71).

Venus revives the world in a picturesque springtime image, which includes pacifying the fearful and violent Mars with her "eternal wound of love" (*aeterno devictus vulnere amoris* – *DRN* 1.34). Throughout the six books Lucretius exposits various aspects of nature from the compositional elements which the Epicureans traditionally called "atoms," to the six senses and even the tyrannical oppression of sexual desire. Lucretius then traces through the history of human civilization that climaxes with his rendition of the Athenian plague. Monica Gale (among others) has noted the cyclical nature of Lucretius' message, i.e., death and life happen in mutually inter-dependent cycles.[7] The particles that make up all things flow and transfer from thing to thing in a great cosmic dance (*DRN* 2.62-79), as they move away from one thing (death), they move to another (new life). As Lucretius said, "one thing never ceases to arise from another and life is only ever given on loan" (*DRN* 3.970-1), and "Nature restores one thing from another thing, neither does anything happen to be born unless aided by another death" (*DRN* 1.263-4). Thus, this great Didactic Epic ends with a horrifyingly graphic depiction of mass human death. Yet, within the context of death as the means of new life, it is as if Lucretius implicitly suggested that the next line was to be: "Generatrix of the Romans, desire of men and gods, nurturing-mother Venus . . ." (*Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divumque voluptas, alma Venus . . .*)

Book 1

The opening book to this Epic of educational poetry functions, in many ways, like a typical introduction. It contains an overview of the basic foci, such as an introduction to the "atoms." Except that Lucretius never used the word *atomus* (the Latin equivalent to the Greek ἄτομος – "atom"); rather, he used a host of images and vocabulary such as *rerum primordia* ("origins of things" *DRN* 1.55), *semina rerum* ("seeds of things" 1.59), and *corpora prima* ("first bodies" 1.61). In the proem, we see Venus pacify Mars and call new life into vibrant activity, and Lucretius condemns religious ritual through an emotionally charged illustration of Agammemnon trying to appease Artimis by killing his daughter Iphigenia (1.80-101). Then, after presenting an overview of the elements of reality, which includes an imaginatively circular depiction of the poem itself as the "muse" that inspires the poem (1.628-34), Lucretius overviews and critiques previous authorities on physical reality (1.635-920).[8] He then finishes this first book with a call to heed his Epicurean wisdom, and so find freedom from the "thunderous temples" (*tonitralia templa* – *DRN* 1.1105) and clarity for blindness (*alid ex alio clarescet nec tibi caeca* – *DRN* 1.1115).

Book 2

The second book is all about the particles, the *primordia rerum*, and how they produce physical reality. He opens this book with a continuation from his call to those trapped

[7] For an excellent overview of this passage see Francesco Montarese, *Lucretius and His Sources: A Study of Lucretius, De Rerum Natura I 635-920*, vol. 12, Sozomena (De Gruyter, 2012).

[8] Similar to how Augustine riffed on this theme, specifically from *DRN* 3.869 (*Mortalem vitam mors cum immortalis ademit*): *Quid enim est quod volo dicere, Domine, nisi quia nescio unde venerim huc, in istam dico vitam mortalem an mortem vitalem* (*Conf*. 1.6.7).

in the *tonitralia templa* to find solace in the *templa serena* (2.8) and so those who have been cured of their blindness can look down upon the wretched *pectora caeca* ("blind hearts" 2.14). Lucretius explains the movement of these particles, how they flow and jostle, i.e., the Epicurean "atomic swerve" (*clinamen principiorum* – *DRN* 2.292) whereby freewill is possible. In this way Lucretius further supports the distinction between his materialist theories and Stoic fatalistic surrender to natural courses. This distinction is necessary because, for Lucretius, similar to Stoicism, all the factors of reality are based on the "covenants of nature" (*per foedera naturai* – *DRN* 2.302). In the latter half of book 2 Lucretius exposits the atomic base for the five senses and how the flowing "principles" create colour, taste, etc. He then closes the book with noting that his explanations have presented a strong case against divine providence, since there is a naturalistic explanation for all these supposed miraculous things (i.e., the same arguments that, many centuries later, became the foundation for atheistic scientism).

Book 3

At this point in the poem Lucretius begins to focus on humanity, beginning with the concept of human mortality and the material nature of the soul. After having closed book 2 with a critique of divine providence, he opens this book with a play on the Greco-Roman *theosis* myths by eulogizing Epicurus as pseudo-deified and the great "sage" who brought rationality and truth about nature by his "power" which strikes "holy fear" into Lucretius (*divina voluptas percipit atque horror, quod sic natura tua vi tam menifesta patens ex omni parte retecta est* – *DRN* 3.28-30). He then spends the rest of the book focused on assuaging the fear of death through presenting the scientific basis for human mortality, arguing ultimately for the central Epicurean axiom that "Death is nothing to us, neither does it have any pertinence at all" (*Nil igitur mors est ad nos neque pertinent hilum* – *DRN* 3.830). Near the end of the book, Lucretius presents his famous scene of the reluctant diner (3.931-77), wherein an old man, who has consumed life to the full, refuses to submit to his mortal nature and is likened to an over-satiated dinner guest who refuses to retire to his post-dinner nap. Lucretius also associates those who seek to prolong the inevitable and acquire greatness in life to Sisyphus, because in the end we all die. Lucretius says, "however much you strive to hide away the ages for continued living; it is no less than eternal death that remains, it will not be less at that time than it is now, whenever you die" (3.1090-94).

Book 4

After the bleak ending of book 3, Lucretius opens book 4 with a reprise of his honey-cup medicine image (1.935-50), whereby his poetry helps make palatable the philosophy that "the populace abhors" (*vulgus abhorret* – 4.20).[9] He then jumps into the physics of dreams, i.e., how we see "images of things" (*rerum simulacra* – 4.34). This then leads him into a discussion on the physics of the five senses. Since the images seen in dreams

[9] Gale says, "Lucretius' treatment of the plague is ahistorical, and functions on a symbolic level as a portrayal of social collapse, and of the inadequacy of material comforts" (Gale, *Myth and Poetry*, 226).

are false, is it fair to say that we can trust our sight, or other senses? He argues that our senses can be trusted, and that the things which have been considered to be mystical (e.g. echoes in the wild mountains, or nymphs in the woods: *DRN* 4.568-94), have a rational explanation based on the *primordia rerum*. After covering the five senses, Lucretius returns to readdress dreams and fantastical images, which then leads him to discuss dreams so vivid they can cause nocturnal emissions (4.1026-36). He then turns to talk about the overpowering and oppressive nature of sexual urges that lead men to do foolish things such as the "excluded lover" who bursts into a bathroom where his beloved is fumigating with "flatulent perfume," only to be disgusted due to the putrid smell (4.1171-84). This is ultimately a note about the vanity of physical (i.e., sexual) pleasures as opposed to the greatness of mental pleasures such as a true understanding of nature and the goodness of human mortal limitations.

Book 5

After the comical warning in book 4, Lucretius opens book 5 with another ode to Epicurus who has produced "from his merits from his heart for us" such wonderful revelations (5.3-5). Lucretius even claims that "it must be said, he [Epicurus] was a god, a god" (*dicendum est, deus ille fuit, deus* – 5.8). He then develops a sort of reprise of the discussion on human mortality from book 3, except now his focus is the whole cosmos. "To me the world (*mundum*) consists of a mortal body" (5.65). The basis for the mortal cosmos is its atomic nature, i.e., it is also composed of the flowing, shifting, jostling atoms. Thus, even the cosmos itself will eventually deteriorate and dissolve, and thus will make way for a new world. Lucretius thus traces out the history of the cosmos, from its origin (by naturalistic atomic combinations) through to "today." From line 380 to 782 we find Lucretius' meteorological astronomy, i.e., the celestial bodies and their relation to earth and roles in the cosmic dance. He then says, "now I return to the novelty of the world and the soft fields of the earth" (5.780-81). He describes the emergence of life from *Mater Terra*, as generated *sponte sua* ("from itself" – 5.804). "Wherefore also Earth rightly earned the name *Mater*, because she herself created the genus *Homo*" (5.821-23). But this great *Mater* is now like a woman in menopause, no longer producing humans and animals from the ground. For the remainder of the book, Lucretius traces the tragic development of human civilization and the beginnings of avarice, corruption, and desecration of *Mater Terra*. Lucretius depicts even music and dancing as a form of parental abuse, i.e., "beating *Mater Terra* with hard feet" (5.1402). Thus, he summarizes the irony of human grandeur, "They saw one thing after another with clarity in the heart, to come up to the extreme pinnacle of the arts" (5.1454-55). Thus, Lucretius sets up for the graphic account of the Athenian plague in a context that reminds one of the saying: "how the mighty have fallen."

Book 6

Lucretius' pseudo-praise of human accomplishment at the end of book 5 shifts in the proem of book 6 into a pleasant account of the glory of human cultural grandeur along with

another eulogy to Epicurus. It was Epicurus who showed humanity the *bonum summum* ("greatest good") to which we all aspire (6.26). In other words, it is Epicurean wisdom that leads to true fulfilment and peace in life, not the hubristic avarice of the foolish masses. Still, the fear of the gods and their wrath might linger. Thus, Lucretius takes time to discuss the naturalistic basis for meteorological phenomena such as lightning, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, etc. Throughout these six books, the reader has learned about the natural flow of the *primordia rerum*, the way they produce various forms of things both living and inanimate, the goodness of human mortality, the process of how the senses are trustworthy, and the way humanity is naturally drawn to self-enhancement through foolish hubris. After all that and learning about the naturalistic explanations behind what had been thought to be divine portents, the newly initiated Epicurean is ready to face the greatest test: mass human devastation and death. Drawing from Thucydides' report of the Athenian plague (*Thuc.* 2.47-52), Lucretius gives a detailed presentation of the plague without explicitly identifying it as such (6.1138-1286). Lucretius' aim was to allow the passage to stand outside its historical reality and speak to the reader in their own *Sitz im Leben*.[10] In other words, Lucretius finishes his great Didactic Epic Poem with a test of Epicurean endurance: to be able to endure horrific tragedy with serenity and peace. To be like Epicurus, who, whilst suffering from dysentery and bladder blockage on his own death bed, said: "I am keeping a blessed day which is also the final day of my life" (*Diog. Laert.* 10.22).

The Text and Translation

The Latin text provided here in this parallel edition is based on the critical text edited by Cyril Bailey, *Lucretius on the Nature of Things*, Clarendon Press, 1900. The English translation is by William Ellery Leonard, *T. Lucretius Carus of the Nature of Things: A Metrical Translation*, E. P. Dutton & Co, 1916.

Further Reading

Readers who wish to explore Lucretius' Poem and Epicureanism in greater depth may find the following works especially helpful. They represent some of the most important studies of the poem and its intellectual background.

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[10] PL, 26; 425. All English citations of texts are my own translation.

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Book I

Latin

Liber Primus

Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divomque voluptas,
alma Venus, caeli subter labentia signa
quae mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis
concelebras, per te quoniam genus omne animantum
concipitur visitque exortum lumina solis:
te, dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila caeli
adventumque tuum, tibi suavis daedala tellus
summittit flores, tibi rident aequora ponti
placatumque nitet diffuso lumine caelum.
nam simul ac species patefactast verna diei
et reserata viget genitabilis aura favoni,
aeriae primum volucris te, diva, tuumque
significant initum perculsae corda tua vi.
inde ferae pecudes persultant pabula laeta
et rapidos tranant amnis: ita capta lepore
te sequitur cupide quo quamque inducere pergis.
denique per maria ac montis fluviosque rapacis
frondiferasque domos avium camposque virentis
omnibus incutiens blandum per pectora amorem
efficis ut cupide generatim saecla propagent.
quae quoniam rerum naturam sola gubernas
nec sine te quicquam dias in luminis oras
exoritur neque fit laetum neque amabile quicquam,
te sociam studeo scribendis versibus esse,
quos ego de rerum natura pangere conor
Memmiadae nostro, quem tu, dea, tempore in omni
omnibus ornatum voluisti excellere rebus.
quo magis aeternum da dictis, diva, leporem.
effice ut interea fera moenera militiai
per maria ac terras omnis sopita quiescant;
nam tu sola potes tranquilla pace iuvare
mortalis, quoniam belli fera moenera Mavors

English

Book I

Mother of Rome, delight of Gods and men,
Dear Venus that beneath the gliding stars
Makest to teem the many-voyaged main
And fruitful lands – for all of living things
Through thee alone are evermore conceived,
Through thee are risen to visit the great sun-
Before thee, Goddess, and thy coming on,
Flee stormy wind and massy cloud away,
For thee the daedal Earth bears scented flowers,
For thee waters of the unvexed deep
Smile, and the hollows of the serene sky
Glow with diffused radiance for thee!
For soon as comes the springtime face of day,
And procreant gales blow from the West unbarred,
First fowls of air, smit to the heart by thee,
Foretoken thy approach, O thou Divine,
And leap the wild herds round the happy fields
Or swim the bounding torrents. Thus amain,
Seized with the spell, all creatures follow thee
Whithersoever thou walkest forth to lead,
And thence through seas and mountains and swift streams,
Through leafy homes of birds and greening plains,
Kindling the lure of love in every breast,
Thou bringest the eternal generations forth,
Kind after kind. And since ‘tis thou alone
Guidest the Cosmos, and without thee naught
Is risen to reach the shining shores of light,
Nor aught of joyful or of lovely born,
Thee do I crave co-partner in that verse
Which I presume on Nature to compose
For Memmius mine, whom thou hast willed to be
Peerless in every grace at every hour-
Wherefore indeed, Divine one, give my words
Immortal charm. Lull to a timely rest
O’er sea and land the savage works of war,
For thou alone hast power with public peace
To aid mortality; since he who rules
The savage works of battle, puissant Mars,
How often to thy bosom flings his strength

armipotens regit, in gremium qui saepe tuum se
reiicit aeterno devictus vulnere amoris,
atque ita suspiciens tereti cervice reposta
pascit amore avidos inhians in te, dea, visus
eque tuo pendet resupini spiritus ore.
hunc tu, diva, tuo recubantem corpore sancto
circum fusa super, suavis ex ore loquellas
funde petens placidam Romanis, incluta, pacem;
nam neque nos agere hoc patriai tempore iniquo
possumus aequo animo nec Memmi clara propago
talibus in rebus communi desse saluti.
omnis enim per se divum natura necessest
immortali aevo summa cum pace fruatur
semota ab nostris rebus seiunctaque longe;
nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,
ipsa suis pollens opibus, nihil indiga nostri,
nec bene promeritis capitur nec tangitur ira.
Quod super est, vacuas auris animumque sagacem
semotum a curis adhibe veram ad rationem,
ne mea dona tibi studio disposta fideli,
intellecta prius quam sint, contempta relinquas.
nam tibi de summa caeli ratione deumque
disserere incipiam et rerum primordia pandam,
unde omnis natura creet res, auctet alatque,
quove eadem rursum natura perempta resolvat,
quae nos materiem et genitalia corpora rebus
reddunda in ratione vocare et semina rerum
appellare suemus et haec eadem usurpare
corpora prima, quod ex illis sunt omnia primis.
Humana ante oculos foede cum vita iaceret
in terris oppressa gravi sub religione,
quae caput a caeli regionibus ostendebat
horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans,
primum Graius homo mortalis tollere contra
est oculos ausus primusque obsistere contra;
quem neque fama deum nec fulmina nec minitanti
murmure compressit caelum, sed eo magis acrem
inritat animi virtutem, effringere ut arta
naturae primus portarum claustra cupiret.
ergo vivida vis animi pervicit et extra
processit longe flammantia moenia mundi
atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque,
unde refert nobis victor quid possit oriri,
quid nequeat, finita potestas denique cuique
qua nam sit ratione atque alte terminus haerens.

O'ermastered by the eternal wound of love-
And there, with eyes and full throat backward thrown,
Gazing, my Goddess, open-mouthed at thee,
Pastures on love his greedy sight, his breath
Hanging upon thy lips. Him thus reclined
Fill with thy holy body, round, above!
Pour from those lips soft syllables to win
Peace for the Romans, glorious Lady, peace!
For in a season troublous to the state
Neither may I attend this task of mine
With thought untroubled, nor mid such events
The illustrious scion of the Memmian house
Neglect the civic cause.

And for the rest, summon to judgments true,
Unbusied ears and singleness of mind
Withdrawn from cares; lest these my gifts, arranged
For thee with eager service, thou disdain
Before thou comprehendest: since for thee
I prove the supreme law of Gods and sky,
And the primordial germs of things unfold,
Whence Nature all creates, and multiplies
And fosters all, and whither she resolves
Each in the end when each is overthrown.
This ultimate stock we have devised to name
Procreant atoms, matter, seeds of things,
Or primal bodies, as primal to the world.
Whilst human kind
Throughout the lands lay miserably crushed
Before all eyes beneath Religion – who
Would show her head along the region skies,
Glowering on mortals with her hideous face-
A Greek it was who first opposing dared
Raise mortal eyes that terror to withstand,
Whom nor the fame of Gods nor lightning's stroke
Nor threatening thunder of the ominous sky
Abashed; but rather chafed to angry zest
His dauntless heart to be the first to rend
The crossbars at the gates of Nature old.
And thus his will and hardy wisdom won;
And forward thus he fared afar, beyond
The flaming ramparts of the world, until
He wandered the unmeasurable All.
Whence he to us, a conqueror, reports
What things can rise to being, what cannot,
And by what law to each its scope prescribed,
Its boundary stone that clings so deep in Time.

quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim
opteritur, nos exaequat victoria caelo.
Illud in his rebus vereor, ne forte rearis
impia te rationis inire elementa viamque
indugredi sceleris. quod contra saepius illa
religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta.
Aulide quo pacto Triviai virginis aram
Iphianassai turparunt sanguine foede
ductores Danaum delecti, prima virorum.
cui simul infula virgineos circum data comptus
ex utraque pari malarum parte profusast,
et maestum simul ante aras adstare parentem
sensit et hunc propter ferrum celare ministros
aspectuque suo lacrimas effundere civis,
muta metu terram genibus summissa petebat.
nec miserae prodesse in tali tempore quibat,
quod patrio princeps donarat nomine regem;
nam sublata virum manibus tremibundaque ad
aras
deductast, non ut sollemni more sacrorum
perfecto posset claro comitari Hymenaeo,
sed casta inceste nubendi tempore in ipso
hostia concideret mactatu maesta parentis,
exitus ut classi felix faustusque daretur.
tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.
Tutemet a nobis iam quovis tempore vatum
terriloquis victus dictis desciscere quaeres.
quippe etenim quam multa tibi iam fingere
possunt
somnia, quae vitae rationes vertere possint
fortunasque tuas omnis turbare timore!
et merito; nam si certam finem esse viderent
aerumnarum homines, aliqua ratione valerent
religionibus atque minis obsistere vatum.
nunc ratio nulla est restandi, nulla facultas,
aeternas quoniam poenas in morte timendum.
ignoratur enim quae sit natura animai,
nata sit an contra nascentibus insinuetur
et simul intereat nobiscum morte dirempta
an tenebras Orci visat vastasque lacunas
an pecudes alias divinitus insinuet se,
Ennius ut noster cecinit, qui primus amoeno
detulit ex Helicone perenni fronde coronam,
per gentis Italas hominum quae clara clueret;
etsi praeterea tamen esse Acherusia templa
Ennius aeternis exponit versibus edens,
quo neque permaneant animae neque corpora
nostra,
sed quaedam simulacra modis pallentia miris;
unde sibi exortam semper florentis Homeri
commemorat speciem lacrimas effundere salsas
coepisse et rerum naturam expandere dictis.
qua propter bene cum superis de rebus
habenda

Wherefore Religion now is under foot,
And us his victory now exalts to heaven.
I fear perhaps thou deemest that we fare
An impious road to realms of thought profane;
But 'tis that same religion oftener far
Hath bred the foul impieties of men:
As once at Aulis, the elected chiefs,
Foremost of heroes, Danaan counsellors,
Defiled Diana's altar, virgin queen,
With Agamemnon's daughter, foully slain.
She felt the chaplet round her maiden locks
And fillets, fluttering down on either cheek,
And at the altar marked her grieving sire,
The priests beside him who concealed the knife,
And all the folk in tears at sight of her.
With a dumb terror and a sinking knee
She dropped; nor might avail her now that first
'Twas she who gave the king a father's name.
They raised her up, they bore the trembling girl
On to the altar – hither led not now
With solemn rites and hymeneal choir,
But sinless woman, sinfully foredone,
A parent felled her on her bridal day,
Making his child a sacrificial beast
To give the ships auspicious winds for Troy:
Such are the crimes to which Religion leads.

And there shall come the time when even thou,
Forced by the soothsayer's terror-tales, shalt seek
To break from us. Ah, many a dream even now
Can they concoct to rout thy plans of life,
And trouble all thy fortunes with base fears.
I own with reason: for, if men but knew
Some fixed end to ills, they would be strong
By some device unconquered to withstand
Religions and the menacings of seers.
But now nor skill nor instrument is theirs,
Since men must dread eternal pains in death.
For what the soul may be they do not know,
Whether 'tis born, or enter in at birth,
And whether, snatched by death, it die with us,
Or visit the shadows and the vasty caves
Of Orcus, or by some divine decree
Enter the brute herds, as our Ennius sang,
Who first from lovely Helicon brought down
A laurel wreath of bright perennial leaves,
Renowned forever among the Italian clans.
Yet Ennius too in everlasting verse
Proclaims those vaults of Acheron to be,
Though thence, he said, nor souls nor bodies
fare,
But only phantom figures, strangely wan,
And tells how once from out those regions rose
Old Homer's ghost to him and shed salt tears
And with his words unfolded Nature's source.
Then be it ours with steady mind to clasp
The purport of the skies – the law behind
The wandering courses of the sun and moon;

nec tamen ad naris venientis cernimus
umquam
nec calidos aestus tuimur nec frigora quimus
usurpare oculis nec voces cernere suemus;
quae tamen omnia corporea constare necessest
natura, quoniam sensus inpellere possunt;
tangere enim et tangi, nisi corpus, nulla potest
res.
Denique fluctifrago suspensae in litore vestis
uvescunt, eaedem dispansae in sole serescunt.
at neque quo pacto persederit umor aquai
visumst nec rursum quo pacto fugerit aestu.
in parvas igitur partis dispergitur umor,
quas oculi nulla possunt ratione videre.
quin etiam multis solis redeuntibus annis
anulus in digito subter tenuatur habendo,
stilicidi casus lapidem cavat, uncus aratri
ferreus occulte decrescit vomer in arvis,
strataque iam volgi pedibus detrita viarum
saxea conspicimus; tum portas propter aena
signa manus dextras ostendunt adtenuari
saepe salutantum tactu praeterque meantum.
haec igitur minui, cum sint detrita, videmus.
sed quae corpora decedant in tempore quoque,
invida praeclusit speciem natura videndi.
Postremo quae cumque dies naturaque rebus
paulatim tribuit moderatim crescere cogens,
nulla potest oculorum acies contenta tueri,
nec porro quae cumque aevo macieque
senescunt,
nec, mare quae impendent, vesco sale saxa
peresa
quid quoque amittant in tempore cernere
possis.
corporibus caecis igitur natura gerit res.
Nec tamen undique corporea stipata tenentur
omnia natura; namque est in rebus inane.
quod tibi cognosse in multis erit utile rebus
nec sinet errantem dubitare et quaerere semper
de summa rerum et nostris diffidere dictis.
qua propter locus est intactus inane vacansque.
quod si non esset, nulla ratione moveri
res possent; namque officium quod corporis
exstat,
officere atque obstare, id in omni tempore
adesset
omnibus; haud igitur quicquam procedere
posset,
principium quoniam cedendi nulla daret res.
at nunc per maria ac terras sublimaque caeli
multa modis multis varia ratione moveri
cernimus ante oculos, quae, si non esset inane,
non tam sollicito motu privata carerent
quam genita omnino nulla ratione fuissent,

With eyes we view not burning heats, nor cold,
Nor are we wont men's voices to behold.
Yet these must be corporeal at the base,
Since thus they smite the senses: naught there is
Save body, having property of touch.
And raiment, hung by surf-beat shore, grows
moist,
The same, spread out before the sun, will dry;
Yet no one saw how sank the moisture in,
Nor how by heat off-driven. Thus we know,
That moisture is dispersed about in bits
Too small for eyes to see. Another case:
A ring upon the finger thins away
Along the under side, with years and suns;
The drippings from the eaves will scoop the
stone;
The hooked ploughshare, though of iron, wastes
Amid the fields insidiously. We view
The rock-paved highways worn by many feet;
And at the gates the brazen statues show
Their right hands leaner from the frequent
touch
Of wayfarers innumerable who greet.
We see how wearing-down hath minished
these,
But just what motes depart at any time,
The envious nature of vision bars our sight.
Lastly whatever days and nature add
Little by little, constraining things to grow
In due proportion, no gaze however keen
Of these our eyes hath watched and known. No
more
Can we observe what's lost at any time,
When things wax old with eld and foul decay,
Or when salt seas eat under beetling crags.
Thus Nature ever by unseen bodies works.

But yet creation's neither crammed nor blocked
About by body: there's in things a void-
Which to have known will serve thee many a
turn,
Nor will not leave thee wandering in doubt,
Forever searching in the sum of all,
And losing faith in these pronouncements mine.
There's place intangible, a void and room.
For were it not, things could in nowise move;
Since body's property to block and check
Would work on all and at an times the same.
Thus naught could evermore push forth and go,
Since naught elsewhere would yield a starting
place.
But now through oceans, lands, and heights of
heaven,
By divers causes and in divers modes,
Before our eyes we mark how much may move,
Which, finding not a void, would fail deprived
Of stir and motion; nay, would then have been
Nowise begot at all, since matter, then,

undique materies quoniam stipata quiesset.
Praeterea quamvis solidae res esse putentur,
hinc tamen esse licet raro cum corpore cernas.
in saxis ac speluncis permanat aquarum
liquidus umor et uberibus flent omnia guttis.
dissipat in corpus sese cibus omne animantum;
crescunt arbusta et fetus in tempore fundunt,
quod cibus in totas usque ab radicibus imis
per truncos ac per ramos diffunditur omnis.
inter saepta meant voces et clausa domorum
transvolitant, rigidum permanat frigus ad ossa.
quod nisi inania sint, qua possent corpora quaeque
transire, haud ulla fieri ratione videres.
Denique cur alias aliis praestare videmus
pondere res rebus nihilo maiore figura?
nam si tantundemst in lanae glomere quantum
corporis in plumbo est, tantundem pendere par est,
corporis officiumst quoniam premere omnia deorsum,
contra autem natura manet sine pondere inanis.
ergo quod magnumst aeque leviusque videtur,
ni mirum plus esse sibi declarat inanis;
at contra gravius plus in se corporis esse
dedicat et multo vacui minus intus habere.
est igitur ni mirum id quod ratione sagaci
quaerimus, admixtum rebus, quod inane vocamus.

Illud in his rebus ne te deducere vero
possit, quod quidam fingunt, praecurrere cogor.
cedere squamigeris latices nitentibus aiunt
et liquidas aperire vias, quia post loca pisces
linquant, quo possint cedentes confluere undae;
sic alias quoque res inter se posse moveri
et mutare locum, quamvis sint omnia plena.
scilicet id falsa totum ratione receptumst.
nam quo squamigeri poterunt procedere tandem,
ni spatium dederint latices? concedere porro
quo poterunt undae, cum pisces ire nequibunt?
aut igitur motu privandumst corpora quaeque
aut esse admixtum dicundumst rebus inane,
unde initum primum capiat res quaeque movendi.
Postremo duo de concursu corpora lata
si cita dissiliant, nempe aer omne necessest,
inter corpora quod fiat, possidat inane.

Had staid at rest, its parts together crammed.
Then too, however solid objects seem,

They yet are formed of matter mixed with void:
In rocks and caves the watery moisture seeps,
And beady drops stand out like plenteous tears;
And food finds way through every frame that lives;
The trees increase and yield the season's fruit
Because their food throughout the whole is poured,
Even from the deepest roots, through trunks and boughs;
And voices pass the solid walls and fly
Reverberant through shut doorways of a house;
And stiffening frost seeps inward to our bones.
Which but for voids for bodies to go through
'Tis clear could happen in nowise at all.
Again, why see we among objects some
Of heavier weight, but of no bulkier size?
Indeed, if in a ball of wool there be
As much of body as in lump of lead,
The two should weigh alike, since body tends
To load things downward, while the void abides,
By contrary nature, the imponderable.
Therefore, an object just as large but lighter
Declares infallibly its more of void;
Even as the heavier more of matter shows,
And how much less of vacant room inside.
That which we're seeking with sagacious quest
Exists, infallibly, commixed with things–
The void, the invisible inane.
Right here
I am compelled a question to expound,
Forestalling something certain folk suppose,
Lest it avail to lead thee off from truth:
Waters (they say) before the shining breed
Of the swift scaly creatures somehow give,
And straightway open sudden liquid paths,
Because the fishes leave behind them room
To which at once the yielding billows stream.
Thus things among themselves can yet be moved,
And change their place, however full the Sum–
Received opinion, wholly false forsooth.
For where can scaly creatures forward dart,
Save where the waters give them room? Again,
Where can the billows yield a way, so long
As ever the fish are powerless to go?
Thus either all bodies of motion are deprived,
Or things contain admixture of a void
Where each thing gets its start in moving on.
Lastly, where after impact two broad bodies
Suddenly spring apart, the air must crowd
The whole new void between those bodies formed;
But air, however it stream with hastening gusts,

Book II

Latin

Liber Secundus

Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis
e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem;
non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas,
sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere
suavest.
suave etiam belli certamina magna tueri
per campos instructa tua sine parte pericli;
sed nihil dulcius est, bene quam munita tenere
edita doctrina sapientum templa serena,
despicere unde queas alios passimque videre
errare atque viam palantis quaerere vitae,
certare ingenio, contendere nobilitate,
noctes atque dies niti praestante labore
ad summas emergere opes rerumque potiri.

o miseras hominum mentes, o pectora caeca!
qualibus in tenebris vitae quantisque periclis
degitur hoc aevi quod cumquest! nonne videre
nihil aliud sibi naturam latrare, nisi ut qui
corpore seiunctus dolor absit, mente fruatur
iucundo sensu cura semota metuque?
ergo corpoream ad naturam pauca videmus
esse opus omnino: quae demant cumque
dolorem,
delicias quoque uti multas substernere possint
gratius inter dum, neque natura ipsa requirit,
si non aurea sunt iuvenum simulacra per aedes
lampadas igniferas manibus retinentia dextris,
lumina nocturnis epulis ut suppeditentur,
nec domus argento fulget auroque renidet
nec citharae reboant laqueata auarataque
templa,
cum tamen inter se prostrati in gramine molli
propter aquae rivum sub ramis arboris altae
non magnis opibus iucunde corpora curant,

English

Book II

'Tis sweet, when, down the mighty main, the
winds
Roll up its waste of waters, from the land
To watch another's labouring anguish far,
Not that we joyously delight that man
Should thus be smitten, but because 'tis sweet
To mark what evils we ourselves be spared;
'Tis sweet, again, to view the mighty strife
Of armies embattled yonder o'er the plains,
Ourselves no sharers in the peril; but naught
There is more goodly than to hold the high
Serene plateaus, well fortressed by the wise,
Whence thou may'st look below on other men
And see them ev'rywhere wand'ring, all
dispersed
In their lone seeking for the road of life;
Rivals in genius, or emulous in rank,
Pressing through days and nights with hugest
toil
For summits of power and mastery of the world.

O wretched minds of men! O blinded hearts!
In how great perils, in what darks of life
Are spent the human years, however brief!-
O not to see that nature for herself
Barks after nothing, save that pain keep off,
Disjoined from the body, and that mind enjoy
Delightsome feeling, far from care and fear!
Therefore we see that our corporeal life
Needs little, altogether, and only such
As takes the pain away, and can besides
Strew underneath some number of delights.
More grateful 'tis at times (for nature craves
No artifice nor luxury), if forsooth
There be no golden images of boys
Along the halls, with right hands holding out
The lamps ablaze, the lights for evening feasts,
And if the house doth glitter not with gold
Nor gleam with silver, and to the lyre resound
No fretted and gilded ceilings overhead,
Yet still to lounge with friends in the soft grass
Beside a river of water, underneath
A big tree's boughs, and merrily to refresh

inde alii multi reges rerumque potentes
occiderunt, magnis qui gentibus imperitarunt.
ille quoque ipse, viam qui quondam per mare magnum
stravit iterque dedit legionibus ire per altum
ac pedibus salsas docuit super ire lucunas
et contempsit equis insultans murmura ponti,
lumine adempto animam moribundo corpore fudit.
Scipiadas, belli fulmen, Carthaginis horror,
ossa dedit terrae proinde ac famul infimus esset.
adde repertores doctrinarum atque leporum,
adde Heliconiadum comites; quorum unus Homerus
sceptra potitus eadem aliis sopitus quietest.
denique Democritum post quam matura vetustas
admonuit memores motus languescere mentis,
sponte sua leto caput obvius optulit ipse.
ipse Epicurus obit decurso lumine vitae,
qui genus humanum ingenio superavit et omnis
restinxit stellas exortus ut aetherius sol.
tu vero dubitabis et indignabere obire?
mortua cui vita est prope iam vivo atque videnti,
qui somno partem maiorem conteris aevi,
et viligans stertis nec somnia cernere cessas
sollicitamque geris cassa formidine mentem
nec reperire potes tibi quid sit saepe mali, cum
ebrius urgeris multis miser undique curis
atque animo incerto fluitans errore vagaris.'

Si possent homines, proinde ac sentire videntur
pondus inesse animo, quod se gravitate fatiget,
e quibus id fiat causis quoque noscere et unde
tanta mali tam quam moles in pectore constet,
haut ita vitam agerent, ut nunc plerumque videmus
quid sibi quisque velit nescire et quaerere semper,
commutare locum, quasi onus deponere possit.
exit saepe foras magnis ex aedibus ille,
esse domi quem pertaesumst, subitoque [revertit>,
quippe foris nihilo melius qui sentiat esse.
currit agens mannos ad villam praecipitanter
auxilium tectis quasi ferre ardentibus instans;
oscitat extemplo, tetigit cum limina villae,
aut abit in somnum gravis atque oblivia quaerit,

A better man than thou, O worthless hind;
And many other kings and lords of rule
Thereafter have gone under, once who swayed
O'er mighty peoples. And he also, he-
Who whilom paved a highway down the sea,
And gave his legionaries thoroughfare
Along the deep, and taught them how to cross
The pools of brine afoot, and did contemn,
Trampling upon it with his cavalry,
The bellowings of ocean – poured his soul
From dying body, as his light was ta'en.
And Scipio's son, the thunderbolt of war,
Horror of Carthage, gave his bones to earth,
Like to the lowliest villein in the house.
Add finders-out of sciences and arts;
Add comrades of the Heliconian dames,
Among whom Homer, sceptered o'er them all,
Now lies in slumber sunken with the rest.
Then, too, Democritus, when ripened eld
Admonished him his memory waned away,
Of own accord offered his head to death.
Even Epicurus went, his light of life
Run out, the man in genius who o'er-topped
The human race, extinguishing all others,
As sun, in ether arisen, all the stars.
Wilt thou, then, dally, thou complain to go?-
For whom already life's as good as dead,
Whilst yet thou livest and lookest? – who in sleep
Wastest thy life – time's major part, and snorest
Even when awake, and ceasest not to see
The stuff of dreams, and bearest a mind beset
By baseless terror, nor discoverest oft
What's wrong with thee, when, like a sotted wretch,
Thou'rt jostled along by many crowding cares,
And wanderest reeling round, with mind aswim."
If men, in that same way as on the mind
They feel the load that wearies with its weight,
Could also know the causes whence it comes,
And why so great the heap of ill on heart,
O not in this sort would they live their life,
As now so much we see them, knowing not
What 'tis they want, and seeking ever and ever
A change of place, as if to drop the burden.
The man who sickens of his home goes out,
Forth from his splendid halls, and straight – returns,
Feeling i'faith no better off abroad.
He races, driving his Gallic ponies along,
Down to his villa, madly, – as in haste
To hurry help to a house afire. – At once
He yawns, as soon as foot has touched the threshold,
Or drowsily goes off in sleep and seeks
Forgetfulness, or maybe bustles about
And makes for town again. In such a way

aut etiam properans urbem petit atque revisit.
hoc se quisque modo fugit, at quem scilicet, ut fit,
effugere haut potis est: ingratius haeret et odit
propterea, morbi quia causam non tenet aeger;
quam bene si videat, iam rebus quisque relictis
naturam primum studeat cognoscere rerum,
temporis aeterni quoniam, non unius horae,
ambigitur status, in quo sit mortalibus omnis
aetas, post mortem quae restat cumque manendo.
Denique tanto opere in dubiis trepidare periclis
quae mala nos subigit vitai tanta cupido?
certe equidem finis vitae mortalibus adstat
nec devitari letum pote, quin obeamus.
praeterea versamur ibidem atque insumus usque
nec nova vivendo procuditur ulla voluptas;
sed dum abest quod avemus, id exsuperare videtur
cetera; post aliud, cum contigit illud, avemus
et sitis aequa tenet vitai semper hiantis.
posteraque in dubiost fortunam quam vehat aetas,
quidve ferat nobis casus quive exitus instet.
nec prorsum vitam ducendo demimus hilum
tempore de mortis nec delibare valemus,
quo minus esse diu possimus forte perempti.
proinde licet quod vis vivendo condere saecla,
mors aeterna tamen nihilo minus illa manebit,
nec minus ille diu iam non erit, ex hodierno
lumine qui finem vitai fecit, et ille,
mensibus atque annis qui multis occidit ante.

Each human flees himself – a self in sooth,
As happens, he by no means can escape;
And willy-nilly he cleaves to it and loathes,
Sick, sick, and guessing not the cause of ail.
Yet should he see but that, O chiefly then,
Leaving all else, he'd study to divine
The nature of things, since here is in debate
Eternal time and not the single hour,
Mortal's estate in whatsoever remains
After great death.

And too, when all is said,
What evil lust of life is this so great
Subdues us to live, so dreadfully distraught
In perils and alarms? one fixed end
Of life abideth for mortality;
Death's not to shun, and we must go to meet.
Besides we're busied with the same devices,
Ever and ever, and we are at them ever,
And there's no new delight that may be forged
By living on. But whilst the thing we long for
Is lacking, that seems good above all else;
Thereafter, when we've touched it, something else
We long for; ever one equal thirst of life
Grips us agape. And doubtful 'tis what fortune
The future times may carry, or what be
That chance may bring, or what the issue next
Awaiting us. Nor by prolonging life
Take we the least away from death's own time,
Nor can we pluck one moment off, whereby
To minish the aeons of our state of death.
Therefore, O man, by living on, fulfil
As many generations as thou may:
Eternal death shall there be waiting still;
And he who died with light of yesterday
Shall be no briefer time in death's No-more
Than he who perished months or years before.

Book IV

Latin

Liber Quartus

Avia Pieridum peragro loca nullius ante
trita solo. iuvat integros accedere fontis
atque haurire, iuvatque novos decerpere flores
insignemque meo capiti petere inde coronam,
unde prius nulli velarint tempora musae;
primum quod magnis doceo de rebus et artis
religionum animum nodis exsolvere pergo,
deinde quod obscura de re tam lucida pango
carmina musaeo contingens cuncta lepore.
id quoque enim non ab nulla ratione videtur;
nam vel uti pueris absinthia taetra medentes
cum dare conantur, prius oras pocula circum
contingunt mellis dulci flavoque liquore,
ut puerorum aetas inprovida ludificetur
labrorum tenus, interea perpotet amarum
absinthi laticem deceptaque non capiatur,
sed potius tali facto recreata valescat,
sic ego nunc, quoniam haec ratio plerumque
videtur
tristior esse quibus non est tractata, retroque
volgus abhorret ab hac, volui tibi suaviloquenti
carmine Pierio rationem exponere nostram
et quasi musaeo dulci contingere melle;
si tibi forte animum tali ratione tenere
versibus in nostris possem, dum percipis
omnem
naturam rerum ac persentis utilitatem.

Sed quoniam docui cunctarum exordia rerum
qualia sint et quam variis distantia formis
sponte sua volitent aeterno percita motu
quoque modo possit res ex his quaeque creari,

English

Book IV

I wander afield, thriving in sturdy thought,
Through unpathed haunts of the Pierides,
Trodden by step of none before. I joy
To come on undefiled fountains there,
To drain them deep; I joy to pluck new flowers,
To seek for this my head a signal crown
From regions where the Muses never yet
Have garlanded the temples of a man:
First, since I teach concerning mighty things,
And go right on to loose from round the mind
The tightened coils of dread religion;
Next, since, concerning themes so dark, I frame
Song so pellucid, touching all throughout
Even with the Muses' charm – which, as 'twould
seem,
Is not without a reasonable ground:
For as physicians, when they seek to give
Young boys the nauseous wormwood, first do
touch
The brim around the cup with the sweet juice
And yellow of the honey, in order that
The thoughtless age of boyhood be cajoled
As far as the lips, and meanwhile swallow down
The wormwood's bitter draught, and, though
befooled,
Be yet not merely duped, but rather thus
Grow strong again with recreated health:
So now I too (since this my doctrine seems
In general somewhat woeful unto those
Who've had it not in hand, and since the crowd
Starts back from it in horror) have desired
To expound our doctrine unto thee in song
Soft-speaking and Pierian, and, as 'twere,
To touch it with sweet honey of the Muse-
If by such method haply I might hold
The mind of thee upon these lines of ours,
Till thou dost learn the nature of all things
And understandest their utility.
But since I've taught already of what sort
The seeds of all things are, and how distinct
In divers forms they flit of own accord,
Stirred with a motion everlasting on,
And in what mode things be from them create,

nil magnis intervallis de corpore libant
flammarum, nihil ad speciem est contractior ignis.
proinde, calor quoniam solis lumenque profusum
perveniunt nostros ad sensus et loca fulgent,
forma quoque hinc solis debet filumque videri,
nil adeo ut possis plus aut minus addere vere.
[perveniunt nostros ad sensus et loca fulgent]
lunaque sive notho fertur loca lumine lustrans,
sive suam proprio iactat de corpore lucem,
quidquid id est, nihilo fertur maiore figura
quam, nostris oculis qua cernimus, esse videtur.
nam prius omnia, quae longe semota tuemur
aëra per multum, specie confusa videntur
quam minui filum. quapropter luna necesse est,
quandoquidem claram speciem certamque figuram
praebet, ut est oris extremis cumque notata,
quanta quoquest, tanta hinc nobis videatur in alto.
postremo quos cumque vides hinc aetheris ignes,
scire licet perquam pauxillo posse minores
esse vel exigua maioris parte brevique.
quandoquidem quos cumque in terris cernimus [ignes],
dum tremor [et] clarus dum cernitur ardor eorum,
perparvom quiddam inter dum mutare videntur
alteram utram in partem filum, quo longius absunt.
Illud item non est mirandum, qua ratione
tantulus ille queat tantum sol mittere lumen,
quod maria ac terras omnis caelumque rigando
compleat et calido perfundat cuncta vapore.
[quanta quoquest tanta hinc nobis videatur in alto]
nam licet hinc mundi patefactum totius unum
largifluum fontem scatere atque erumpere lumen,
ex omni mundo quia sic elementa vaporis
undique conveniunt et sic coniectus eorum
confluit, ex uno capite hic ut profluat ardor.
nonne vides etiam quam late parvus aquai
prata riget fons inter dum campisque redundet?
est etiam quoque uti non magno solis ab igni
aëra percipiat calidis fervoribus ardor,
opportunus ita est si forte et idoneus aër,
ut queat accendi parvis ardoribus ictus;

Against our members, those same distances
Take nothing by those intervals away
From bulk of flames; and to the sight the fire
Is nothing shrunken. Therefore, since the heat
And the outpoured light of skiey sun
Arrive our senses and caress our limbs,
Form too and bigness of the sun must look
Even here from earth just as they really be,
So that thou canst scarce nothing take or add.
And whether the journeying moon illuminate
The regions round with bastard beams, or throw
From off her proper body her own light,-
Whichever it be, she journeys with a form
Naught larger than the form doth seem to be
Which we with eyes of ours perceive. For all
The far removed objects of our gaze
Seem through much air confused in their look
Ere minished in their bigness. Wherefore, moon,
Since she presents bright look and clear-cut form,
May there on high by us on earth be seen
Just as she is with extreme bounds defined,
And just of the size. And lastly, whatso fires
Of ether thou from earth beholdest, these
Thou mayst consider as possibly of size
The least bit less, or larger by a hair
Than they appear – since whatso fires we view
Here in the lands of earth are seen to change
From time to time their size to less or more
Only the least, when more or less away,
So long as still they bicker clear, and still
Their glow's perceived.

Nor need there be for men
Astonishment that yonder sun so small
Can yet send forth so great a light as fills
Oceans and all the lands and sky aflood,
And with its fiery exhalations steeps
The world at large. For it may be, indeed,
That one vast-flowing well-spring of the whole
Wide world from here hath opened and out-gushed,
And shot its light abroad; because thuswise
The elements of fiery exhalations
From all the world around together come,
And thuswise flow into a bulk so big
That from one single fountain-head may stream
This heat and light. And seest thou not, indeed,
How widely one small water-spring may wet
The meadow-lands at times and flood the fields?
'Tis even possible, besides, that heat
From forth the sun's own fire, albeit that fire
Be not a great, may permeate the air
With the fierce hot – if but, perchance, the air
Be of condition and so tempered then

quod genus inter dum segetes stipulamque videmus
accidere ex una scintilla incendia passim.
forsitan et rosea sol alte lampade lucens
possideat multum caecis fervoribus ignem
circum se, nullo qui sit fulgore notatus,
aestifer ut tantum radiorum exaugeat ictum.

Nec ratio solis simplex [et] recta patescit,
quo pacto aestivis e partibus aegocerotis
brumalis adeat flexus atque inde revertens
canceris ut vertat metas ad solstitialis,
lunaque mensibus id spatium videatur obire,
annua sol in quo consumit tempora cursu.
non, inquam, simplex his rebus reddita causast.
nam fieri vel cum primis id posse videtur,
Democriti quod sancta viri sententia ponit,
quanto quaeque magis sint terram sidera propter,
tanto posse minus cum caeli turbine ferri;
evanescere enim rapidas illius et acris
imminui supter viris, ideoque relinqui
paulatim solem cum posterioribus signis,
inferior multo quod sit quam fervida signa.
et magis hoc lunam: quanto demissior eius
cursus abest procul a caelo terrisque propinquat,
tanto posse minus cum signis tendere cursum.
flaccidiore etiam quanto iam turbine fertur
inferior quam sol, tanto magis omnia signa
hanc adipiscuntur circum praeterque feruntur.
propterea fit ut haec ad signum quodque reverti
mobilius videatur, ad hanc quia signa revisunt.
fit quoque ut e mundi transversis partibus aër
alternis certo fluere alter tempore possit,
qui queat aestivis solem detrudere signis
brumalis usque ad flexus gelidumque rigorem,
et qui reiciat gelidis a frigoris umbris
aestiferas usque in partis et fervida signa.
et ratione pari lunam stellasque putandumst,
quae volvunt magnos in magnis orbibus annos,
aëribus posse alternis e partibus ire.
nonne vides etiam diversis nubila ventis
diversas ire in partis inferna supernis?
qui minus illa queant per magnos aetheris orbis
aestibus inter se diversis sidera ferri?

As to be kindled, even when beat upon
Only by little particles of heat-
Just as we sometimes see the standing grain
Or stubble straw in conflagration all
From one lone spark. And possibly the sun,
Agleam on high with rosy lampion,
Possesses about him with invisible heats
A plenteous fire, by no effulgence marked,
So that he maketh, he, the Fraught-with-fire,
Increase to such degree the force of rays.
Nor is there one sure cause revealed to men
How the sun journeys from his summer haunts
On to the mid-most winter turning-points
In Capricorn, the thence reverting veers
Back to solstitial goals of Cancer; nor
How 'tis the moon is seen each month to cross
That very distance which in traversing
The sun consumes the measure of a year.
I say, no one clear reason hath been given
For these affairs. Yet chief in likelihood
Seemeth the doctrine which the holy thought
Of great Democritus lays down: that ever
The nearer the constellations be to earth
The less can they by whirling of the sky
Be borne along, because those skiey powers
Of speed aloft do vanish and decrease
In under-regions, and the sun is thus
Left by degrees behind amongst those signs
That follow after, since the sun he lies
Far down below the starry signs that blaze;
And the moon lags even tardier than the sun:
In just so far as is her course removed
From upper heaven and nigh unto the lands,
In just so far she fails to keep the pace
With starry signs above; for just so far
As feebler is the whirl that bears her on,
(Being, indeed, still lower than the sun),
In just so far do all the starry signs,
Circling around, o'ertake her and o'erpass.
Therefore it happens that the moon appears
More swiftly to return to any sign
Along the Zodiac, than doth the sun,
Because those signs do visit her again
More swiftly than they visit the great sun.
It can be also that two streams of air
Alternately at fixed periods
Blow out from transverse regions of the world,
Of which the one may thrust the sun away
From summer-signs to mid-most winter goals
And rigors of the cold, and the other then
May cast him back from icy shades of chill
Even to the heat-fraught regions and the signs
That blaze along the Zodiac. So, too,
We must suppose the moon and all the stars,
Which through the mighty and sidereal years
Roll round in mighty orbits, may be sped
By streams of air from regions alternate.
Seest thou not also how the clouds be sped