

LUCRETIUS 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. 10
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 20
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 30
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 40
That this is clear to all, however slow
Of wit they are? For firstly we all know
That many things out 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 50
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 vestiges 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

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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. 90

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. 100

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 ... 110

...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, 120
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. 130

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 140

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 150
 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 160
 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, 170
 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 180
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 190
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 200

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 210
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 220
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, 230

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 240

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 250

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 260
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 270
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 280
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 290

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 300

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 310

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, 320

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 330

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 340

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

350

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

360

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

370

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 380
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 390
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, 400
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 410
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 420
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; 430

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 440
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 450
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 460

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. 470

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 480

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, 3490
 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 500
 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. 510
 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. 520

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, 530

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 540

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 550
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 560
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 570
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, 590
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 600
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, 610
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 620
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, 630
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, 640
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; 650
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 660
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, 670
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. 680
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 690
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
Where 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 700
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 710
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 720

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 730
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 740
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 750

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 760

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 770

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 780
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 790
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 800
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 810
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. 820
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. 830
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 for the sake of use, we may suppose.

But of a very different class are those 840
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 850

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. 860

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, 870

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, 880

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. 890

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. 900

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; 910

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 920

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, 930
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. 940
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 950
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 960
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 980
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, 990
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 1000
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 1010

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, 1020
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 1030
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 1040

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 1050

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 1060

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 1070
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 1080
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, 1090
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, 1100
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. 1110

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 1120
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 1140
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, 1150
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 1160
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 1160
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 1170
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 1180
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 1190
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 1200
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, 1210
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 1220
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 1230
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 1204
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 1250
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, 1260
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 1270
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 pleurably
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.

