

LUCRETIUS V

Who can create prodigious poetry
On all these findings and the majesty
Of Nature? Who can speak praise that is worth
His intellect and to such gems give birth
And pass them on to us? Well, certainly
No mortal! For as this known majesty
Demands, he was a god, great Memmius –
O yes, a god, the first of all of us
To find the reasoned plan of life we call
Wisdom and out of such tempestuous squall 10
And darkness settled it in light so clear.
Compare discoveries of yesteryear:
Ceres, they say, invented corn, Bacchus
Pioneered the liquor of the vine for us;
And yet without these things we could endure,
As they say others do. But when impure,
A mind can't live a good life. Therefore we
Can credit this man with divinity
With better reason, for he has supplied
Great states with solace that has mollified 20
Men's minds. But if you think you can compare
The deeds of Hercules with him, it's fair
To say you're wrong. For why would we have cause
To fear the great Nemean lion's jaws
Or yet the bristling boar of Arcady?
How could the Cretan bull cause misery?
The pest of Lerna? Or what suffering

Can poisonous Hydra cause? What of the king
 With triple breasts? What of those birds of prey
 That hunted the Strymphiian lake? Or, say, 30
 The steeds of Diomedes, breathing fire?
 The beast of the Hesperides, fierce, dire,
 Guarding the golden apples, piercingly
 Glaring, coiled tightly round the trunk of a tree –
 By the Atlantic shore beside the grim
 Regions of ocean, what mischief from him
 Can we expect? For nobody goes there,
 Neither the Romans nor those from elsewhere.
 How can such monsters, now they have been slain,
 Cause such distress? They cannot, I maintain - 40
 The earth now teems with wild beasts, but our dread
 Is mostly of the lands we never tread
 Upon, the forests, peaks, woods that lie deep
 Below us. If, however, we don't sweep
 The evil from our minds, what feuds shall we
 Incite, what menaces, whether it be
 Our will or no? Lust brings anxiety
 To mortals: great is their timidity. 50
 But what of pride and smut and biliousness?
 The pain they cause is so calamitous.
 Lasciviousness and sloth? The man who's cast
 Them from his mind into the icy blast
 Of winds by words, and not by swords – should he
 Not be included in the panoply
 Of gods? – especially since in godlike fashion
 He spoke about the gods themselves with passion

And told us of the cause of everything.

His steps I trace, his doctrines following: 60

How everything abides by the decree

By which they' re made you're learning now from me,

And how Time's solid laws they can't recall.

The nature of the mind is, first of all,

A body that is born but cannot keep

Intact for long, but images, in sleep,

Alone mislead it when we seem to see

A man who's died. My reason, finally,

Is that the world, though mortal, also came

To be created, for it's just the same 70

With earth, sky, sea, stars, sun and moon; I'll show

What animals arose from earth, although

Some were not born at all; and I will teach

How humans used multiple kinds of speech

By giving names to things, and how the fear

Crept in the hearts of mortals, so that here

On earth their groves and altars we maintain,

Their pools and images; and I'll explain

How Nature steers the motions of the sun

And moon lest it occur to anyone 80

That they move of their own accord to aid

Increase of crops and beasts or that they're made

To do their work by some divinity.

If those who have been taught appropriately

That gods are carefree, though they're mystified

That life goes on, especially since they've spied

Celestial incidents, they will return

To ancient fallacies and hope to learn
From harsh taskmasters, thinking wretchedly
That they're omniscient, though what can be
Or what cannot be they themselves don't know,
In other words how everything can show
Scant strength and a boundary-stone that's been set deep.
Well then, I'll make no promises to keep
You longer. Firstly, look at every sea,
The earth and sky. They, Memmius, have three
Masses and three foundations, all discrete,
And yet in just one day they're bound to meet
Their end: the great, meshed system of the world,
Upheld through many eons, will be hurled 100
To ruin. Yet I find it strange to be
Aware of heaven and earth's fatality
And how hard it will be by argument
To prove. This happens when your ears are bent
To something you have not heard hitherto
And cannot hold nor bring into your view
(For this you'll find the truth). Yet I will be
Forthright. The very facts themselves maybe
Will earn belief and shortly there'll arise
Destructive earthquakes right before your eyes. 110
May fortune spare us this, and may insight,
Not the event, teach us the world just might
Collapse with a dreadful crash. Initially,
Before I start to speak, more solemnly
And with more reasoning than at Delphi
Apollo's oracle was spoken, I

Will comfort you with perspicuity
Lest, curbed by superstition, you maybe
Think earth, sun, sky, stars, moon and ocean's tide
Are heavenly bodies and thus must abide 120
Forever and believe a penalty
Should be imposed for their iniquity
(Just like the Giants) since with reasoning
They shook the world to quench the glimmering
Of heaven's sun, while also bringing low
Immortal things with mortal speech, although
They're far from holy and don't rate a place
Among the gods, but rather, in their case,
We should believe that they are motionless,
Possessing not a whit of consciousness. 130
For mind and understanding can't reside
In everything, just as the ocean's tide
Contains no clouds, the upper air can't yield
A single tree, no fish live in a field,
Wood holds no blood, no sap is in a stone:
It's firmly fixed where each thing must be grown
And live. Without a frame mentality
Cannot arise, nor can it ever be
Far from sinews and blood. But if it could
Perform these things, more easily it would 140
Do so in head, heels, shoulders, anywhere
In the same man, but since within us there
Is seen a hard-and-fast rule and decree
That tells where mind and spirit have to be
To grow apart – thus must it be denied

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

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What novelty entices them to make
A change? For clearly one will have to take
Pleasure in new things once he's been harassed
By old ones. If, however, in times past
He's lived a life of pure serenity,
What then could spark a love of novelty? 180
What injury, had we not been created,
Was there for us to suffer? Were we fated
To wallow in our gloomy misery
Till light on our creation shone? For he
Who has been born must have a lasting care
To carry on as long as he's kept there
By soothing happiness. However, he
Who's never tasted life would equally
Remain unhurt. Again, whence was the thought
That was the start of all creation brought 190
To the gods, even an idea of mankind
In order that they might bring to their mind
What they should make? How could they ever see
The power of germs? What, through variety,
May they not do if Nature had not made
A model for creation? A parade
Of many first-beginnings, frequently
Smitten and borne by their own energy,
Have moved and met together and combined
In many structures so that they might find 200
Something they could produce. No wonder they
Made such designs, displaying an array
Of movements, as this sum of things now shows

As by eternal scrutiny it grows.
Yet granting that I did not even know
About the first beginnings, I would go
So far as, from the ways of heaven, to state
And, from a mass of facts, elaborate
That the nature of all things has not been made
By godly power, for it has been betrayed 210
By many faults. All that the canopy
Of heaven covers is extensively
Filled up with forests where wild animals roam,
As well as mountains and the sea, whose foam
Parts shores, and rocks and swamps. Two-thirds of these,
Almost, have weather that would make men freeze
To death or die of heatstroke, and therefore
They have been robbed from mortals. Furthermore,
Brambles envelop all the land that's left,
Though men fight back, wont to apply their heft 220
With mattocks out of sheer necessity.
However, if with all this industry
We could not give them life, no growth could fly
Spontaneously into the lambent sky;
And sometimes, once procured with diligent toil,
When they're already covering the soil
With leafage, all in bloom, the sun will beat
Upon them with a monumental heat
Or they're cut off by sudden rain or frost
Or by grim blasts of winds and tempest tossed. 230
And why does Nature feed and help to grow
The frightful tribes of savage beasts although

They're mankind's foes across all lands and seas?
And why do certain seasons bring disease?
Why does untimely death stalk us? Besides,
Just like a sailor cast in cruel tides,
A naked child lies speechless on the earth
In need of vital aid since at its birth,
Cast forth to face the regions of daylight,
It fills the air with cries – as well it might 240
Considering the miseries that lie
Ahead. Those flocks and herds, though, multiply,
As do the savage beasts: they don't possess
The need to hear a nurse's tenderness
Or baby-talk or rattles, nor do they
Need different clothes depending on the day,
High walls to guard their own or weaponry –
From earth they have a superfluity
Of all that they require, for Nature brings
Her ingenuity to fashion things. 250
Since earth and water and torridity
And wind's light breezes, which we all may see
Compose this sum of everything, possess
A mortal body, we may also guess
The world is likewise built. For when we see
That beasts have mortal bodies, naturally
They must be mortal too and therefore, when
I see the world consumed and born again,
I may be certain that once in the past
Both heaven and earth were born but will not last
Forever. But you must not have presumed 260

I begged the question there when I assumed
That earth and fire are both subject to death
When I was quick to say in the same breath
That air and water are reborn and start
To grow again; in the first place, a part
Of Earth, much blackened by eternal heat
And trampled by a multitude of feet,
Exhales a cloud of dust and flying spray
Which by strong blasts of wind are blown away. 270

Rains wash away some soil, and rivers gnaw
And nibble at the banks and, furthermore,
What Earth feeds and increases then will be
Returned with due proportionality.
Since Nature is the universal womb,
It's just as certain that she is the tomb:
You see the earth diminishes therefore,
Expands and grows again and, furthermore,
There is no need to say that rivers, sea
And springs always well up abundantly. 280

But what streams up at first is moved away,
And so the moisture's volume still will stay
The same, in part because strong winds then hit
The surface of the sea and lessen it
And by the sun's rays it is decomposed,
In part because deep down it gets disposed
Through all the earth beneath. The pungency
Is strained off and the moisture oozingly
Returns and everything meets at the source
Of every river, whence it may then course 290

Along the paths cut for it. Now to you
I'll speak about the air which changes through
Its entire body all the time in ways
So different, for everything that strays
From things is borne into that massive tract
Of air; and if this air did not react
And send back particles to them again,
Renewing them as they fly off, well then
All is dissolved in air, which thus must be
Produced from things and fall back constantly 300
Into things. The generous fountain of clear light,
The sun, diligently shines in heaven so bright,
Ever renewing beams which, when they fall,
Are lost. When in between that fiery ball
And mortals clouds appear and in the skies
Break up its rays, you now must realize
Its lower part is gone immediately
And Earth's blacked out wherever clouds may be:
Things always need new light, as you now know,
And one by one we lose each dazzling glow, 310
And we can't see things in the sun unless
The source of light gives us a limitless
Supply. Again, you see on earth at night
Light's sources – hanging lamps, all shining bright
With flickering flashes, thick with smoke and fed
With fire in similar manner, keen to spread
Their light around, unbroken (it would seem)
And not departing, for with each new beam
They stop their own extinction speedily

From all those fires. And so, accordingly, 320

By sun and moon and stars a light's sent out
That's always new, and this we must not doubt,
And the first fire is lost once it is sent,
So do not think their force is permanent.

And even stones are conquered gradually,
Towers fall, rocks crumble and eventually
Gods' temples and their images wear away
And crack so that gods' powers can't delay
The fates and strive against the laws decreed

By Nature. We see statues go to seed 330

And lumps of rock roll down a mountainside
Summarily, unable to abide
The finite tides of time while safe and sound.

Do but observe what holds its arms around
The earth: if everything by them is made,
As some folk say, and, once it has decayed,
Is taken back by them, then you may see
That all is subject to mortality;

For what increases with its nourishment
Other things out of itself must then be meant 340

To be diminished and revivified
When it takes back those very things. Beside
All this, if there had been one primal birth
That caused creation of both heaven and earth,
Why have not other poets sung before
Events foreshadowing the Theban War
Or Troy's destruction? And into what place
Have so many exploits, lacking bardic grace,

Fallen? The world's young, for not long ago
Was its beginning, I believe. And so 350
Improvement's being brought to every kind
Of art at different rates; and we may find
That ships are stronger built, while recently
Musicians learned to fashion melody,
While Nature's system of the world has been
Found recently, and I myself am seen
To be the first who's able to report
It in our tongue. But if you are the sort
To think that all of this is just the same
And many folk have died in scorching flame 360
Or by some universal tragedy
Cities have fallen or incessantly
Torrents have swept across the earth and brought
Destruction on the towns, your very thought
Betrays you, and you'll think that earth and sky
Will be destroyed – when they're bombarded by
Great dangers, if a worse calamity
Then came upon them, there would surely be
Widespread destruction. If someone's unwell
With just the same infection that befell 370
A man who died of it, we must be known
As mortal. Any body that has shown
Its immortality must be compact,
Thus able to reject each harsh impact,
Keeping its close-joined parts unseparated,
For matter's particles, as I've related,
Are close-joined; maybe it's because it's free

Of blows, just as the void is, similarly
Untouched; or maybe it's because there's no
Space round it whither entities may go 380
And vanish (since the sum of all of us,
The universe, is ever limitless),
And there's no place where elements may spring
Apart, no bodies, either, that may fling
Themselves upon it and with one strong blow
Dissolve it. But, as I was keen to show,
The world's not solid, since the void is blent
With certain things, and yet one can't assent
That it is like the void; but there is no
Shortage of bodies which may meet and go 390
Beyond the infinite and overcome
With volleys of destructiveness this sum
Of things; moreover, there's no scarcity
Of space whence it through its profundity
May scatter out the ramparts of the world,
Against which other forces may be hurled.
Death, then, may greet the sun, the earth, the sky,
The sea, for it is ever standing by
With its large, hideous maw: you must confess
They're mortal, and all those things which possess 400
Mortality cannot feel enmity
For Time's great strength through all eternity.
Fire, water, air, earth, all of which include
Most of the world, battled feud after feud
In godless war: therefore can you not see

An end may come to their hostility?
Maybe all water by the scorching sun
May be consumed: they try to get this done,
So far without success; the rivers bring
A huge supply while further threatening 410
To flood us all – in vain, it's found to be,
Because winds sweep the surface of the sea,
Thus loosening the liquid, while on high
The sun unpicks them with its rays; to dry
Them up they hope with confidence, that they
May win before the waters have their way.
Their warlike spirit's fierce as they collide
In well-matched contest that they may decide
About a mighty cause successfully;
At one time fire had the mastery; 420
At one time, too, water, as people say,
Was king across the fields. Fire held sway
And burned up many things, when, very far
From his own bailiwick, Phaethon's car,
Pulled by the sun's strong horses, mightily
Was whirled through sky and earth. But angrily
Great Jove flung down a sudden thunderbolt,
And the ambitious Phaethon with a jolt
Crashed to the earth; the sun then, at his fall,
Took up from him the lamp that lights us all 430
And, bringing back the steeds that trembled so,
Yoked them again (this Greek tale well you know)
And placed them on their proper path. This song,
However, proves to be completely wrong,

Removed from reason – fire can succeed
When, gathered up, its particles exceed
The average number; but it then, somehow
Thrust back, falls down, or else we all would now
Be thoroughly scorched. Once water, as they say,
Gathered up as well and started to hold sway, 440
Whose waves destroyed much of humanity,
But in some way it lost its energy:
The rains stopped and the rivers lost a deal
Of force. But next in order I'll reveal
How matter forms the earth, the sky, the sea,
The sun, the moon. For there was certainly
No plan that led their first seeds to array
Themselves in order and they had no say
In how each one of them should fabricate
Its movements; but each seed, by its own weight, 450
Is borne forever through eternity
Up to our present time and regularly
Is struck and tries out every combination
Of movement, summoning this explanation:
Once they are brought together suddenly
They often start great things through land and sea
And sky, creating the first generation
Of living creatures. In that situation
One could not see the sun's wheel soaring high
Nor the great constellations nor the sky 460
Or sea or earth or anything that we
Might know of but an abnormality –
An alien storm, a mass of seeds that wrought

Disharmony among them all and brought
Chaos to intervals, connections, tracks,
As well as meetings, motions and attacks,
Because their shapes and forms differed in kind
And therefore all of them were not combined
For long and could not move appropriately
Together. Parts began subsequently 470
To separate, as like with like would blend,
And parcel out the universe and lend
A shape to things – that is to say, divide
Heaven from Earth and set a place aside
To house the sea alone that it might be
Apart from, in their own locality,
Heavens' pure fires. The bodies of the earth,
Heavy and meshed, merged and took as their berth
The bottom, and the more that they combined,
The more they squeezed out particles confined 480
Within them so that they could make the sea,
The mighty walls that shield humanity,
The stars, the sun, the moon – their seeds display
More roundness and more smoothness and are way
Smaller than are the earth's. So as it sped
Through the loose-knit interstices to spread
Out of parts of the earth, the flaming air
Rose up and lightly drew away a fair
Amount of fire. Thus, too, we often view
The radiant sun tinting the morning dew 490
And all the lakes and ever-running streams,
Exuding mist, while Earth occasionally seems

To smoke; and when these join together on high,
Clouds knit a concrete weave beneath the sky.
Thus with coherent body the light air
Bent all around, diffusing everywhere
And fenced in all the rest voraciously.
The sun and moon began sequentially,
Alternatively turning in the air;
But neither Earth nor ether took a share 500
Of them – with insufficient heaviness
They could not sink and settle: nonetheless
They weren't so lightweight that they could not flow
About the upper air, remaining, though,
Revolving like live bodies In between
Both regions, just as some of us are seen
At rest, some on the move. Accordingly,
When these had been retraced, suddenly
The earth sank down to where the sea spreads wide
And drowned its hollows in the salty tide. 510
And, blow by frequent blow through countless days,
The earth solidified from the sun's rays
And ether's tide, retreating to its core,
And so the salt and sweat would all the more,
Squeezed from its body, ooze out to the sea
And lakes, extending their capacity,
And so much more those particles of heat
And air flew off and, high above, would meet
And pack the heaven's regions, the plateaus
Were settled down, the lofty mountains rose 520
In height, whose rocks lost their ability

To sink, nor could all sides to the same degree
Subside. The heavy earth with compact frame
Solidified, and Earth's detritus came
To settle in the depths, and then the sea,
Air, ether, made up of liquidity,
Were all left pure, with some of them more light
Than others, although ether reached the height,
Above the rest, in both consistencies,
And hovers far above the airy breeze 530

And does not mingle its consistency
With storms, allowing everything to be
Disturbed by violent tempests and harassed
By wayward squalls while sailing safely past
With its own fires. Indeed the Black Sea shows
Ether with just one current gently flows.
How heavenly bodies move now let me sing:
First, if great heaven's ever circling,
The air must press the pole at either end
And hold it from without to keep it penned 540

From both directions, while another air
Above moves in the same direction where
The world's stars shine, or else another flows
Below and lifts the orb so that it goes
The other way, just as the rivers turn
Their wheels and buckets. Also, we may learn
That it is possible the heavens stay
At rest while all the stars go on their way,
Whether because the ether is confined
And, searching for an exit, has to wind 550

Around and roll the fires everywhere
Through the night-thundering regions of the air,
Or else the fires are driven from a place
Outside by air, or, with a stealthy pace,
They creep where food invites them to partake
Of nourishment as through the sky they make
Their way. For it is difficult to say
Which cause prevails for certain: for what may
Be done and is indeed done variously
In various worlds is what you'll hear from me: 560
More causes I'll draw up to clarify
The movements of the stars throughout the sky;
One cause, though, must hold true for us also,
Making the movements of the stars, although
A step-by-step approach can't indicate
Which one. It's proper that the world's whole weight,
In order that the earth may occupy
Its very core, should gradually fly
Away, diminishing; and there should be
Beneath the earth another entity, 570
United with it since the very start
Of life, tied also to each airy part.
Thus it's no burden and does not depress
The airy breezes, as the limbs no less
Aren't burdensome, and as the human head
Won't tax the neck: as well, let it be said,
We do not feel the body's weight to be
A burden on the feet. Contrarily,
All weights that come from outside and are set

On us annoy, often much smaller yet, 580
However. What each thing can do is key
In nature, then. The earth, similarly,
Is not something brought suddenly from elsewhere
And cast upon us in an alien air –
It was created from the very start
Of the whole world and is a rooted part
Of it, just like our limbs are. Furthermore,
Earth, shaken suddenly with a thunderous roar,
Shakes everything above itself, a thing
Which it could never do did it not cling 590
Securely to the airy parts. For they
Have been united since the world's first day
By common roots. Do you not also see
Our body, in spite of its density,
Is held up by our spirit's flimsiness,
Only because its parts all coalesce?
Again, what's able, leaping vigorously,
To raise the body? What else could it be
Except the powerful spirit shepherding
The limbs? Thus something flimsy, mingling 600
With a heavy body, shows how vigorous
It is, as the mind's strength is joined with us,
And air with Earth? The sun's heat and its wheel
Can't be much greater than the heat we feel
And wheel we see. However far from here
Come rays of fiery light to bring us cheer
By warming us, they lessen not a thing
Throughout this span, not ever narrowing

In our perception. Heat and flooding light
We feel and see, the whole world shining bright 610
With all its rays: the sun's size and its figure
We then can see, no smaller and no bigger.
The moon, whether she makes the world so bright
As on she travels with her bastard light
Or casts her own light, nonetheless her size
Is just the same as that which meets our eyes.
For things we see afar through lots of air
Become dimmed in appearance before they're
Lessened in size. The moon, whose shape is clear,
Must be perceived on high as we down here 620
Perceive it. All fires that on earth we see,
While they're quite visible, occasionally
Appear to change but little either way
In size, according to how far away
They are, and so the fires that meet our eyes
Up in the sky must hardly change their size.
Nor should we wonder how the sun, so slight
In size, can radiate sufficient light
To fill the lands, oceans and skies and spread
Its heat upon them all – it can be said 630
That hence there was created one huge spring
To splash its flood on all of us and fling
Its light, since there are elements of heat
That congregate from everywhere and meet,
Having one single source. Do you not see
How sometimes one whole spring will plenteously
Flood fields and meadows? It is true also

That with but little heat the sun may glow
Profoundly, if by chance the air should be
Apt to be struck by a small quantity

640

Of heat, as someone may at times remark
A mighty conflagration from one spark
Destroy some corn and straw. And we may guess
The sun, while shining brightly, may possess
Some hidden heat which makes the sun's rays swell.

There's no one explanation that can tell
How from its summer home the sun may go
To Capricorn amid the winter's snow

And then to Cancer's solstice, how indeed
The moon is able, with twelve times the speed

650

Of the sun, traverse the same space. As I say,
To solve all this there is no single way.

A likely cause is what Democritus
Has with his splendid wisdom left to us:
While different bodies in the sky progress,
The closer to the earth they are, the less
They're carried by the whirling of the skies;

The rapid energy of their movement dies
Away, the sun is gradually dropped back,
In rear of all the signs of the zodiac,

660

Because it is much lower than they are;
The moon is lower still and very far
From the sky, closer to earth, and therefore she
Can less vie with the signs: proportionately,
As she is borne with less velocity,
Being lower from the sun, the sooner she

Is outrun by the signs: she seems to go
Back to the signs more rapidly, although
The signs return to her. Quite possibly
From various parts two airs alternately 670
At certain times could flow, one strong enough
That from the signs of summer it could puff
The sun to winter's solstice and the blast
Of stiffening cold: another one would cast
Him back again to areas replete
With zodiacal signs and burning heat.
With similar reasoning we must resolve
That moon and stars, which constantly revolve
Through countless periods extensively,
Are blown about quite unpredictably. 680
Do you not see that clouds scud, driven by
Opposing winds in layers, low and high?
Could not the constellations equally
Be carried through the air's trajectory?
But night obscures the earth with murkiness,
Either because the sun in weariness,
At journey's end, has breathed his fires out,
Or else since he's been forced to turn about
Beneath the earth by the same force that bore
His orb above the earth the day before. 690
At a fixed time Matuta spreads around
Her rosy dawn to make the world abound
With light, either because the sun on high,
The earth now left behind, reaches the sky
And tries to kindle it, or else maybe

The fires establish a confederacy,
While many seeds of heat are wont to flow
Together at a certain time, and so
A new light from the sun appears each day,
As at sunrise on Ida, so they say, 700

Are scattered fires seen which then cohere
Into one globe and form a single sphere.
No wonder, though, that this is so, for we
Have seen so many things that come to be
At certain times: at certain times the trees
Will bloom, and when the time arrives for these
To shed their flowers, they do so. Years decree
That teeth fall out, and young lads equally
Will be mature in time, and a beard will grow;
At certain seasons lightning, rain, wind, snow 710

Occur. For causes thus have ever been
Since the beginning, and all of us have seen
Things happening in this way, and now in turn
And in established order they return.
Days also may increase and nights may wane.
Or days may lessen while the nights may gain
Increase, either because the sun, which glides
Above and underneath the earth, divides
The sky into unequal arcs, and when
He takes a piece from one part he will then 720

Allot it to the other till he's got
Up to the heaven's sign where stands the knot
That matches day with night. For in between
The North Wind and the South heaven is seen

To hold her turning-points with equal space
Between them, corresponding to the place
Where sits the zodiac, where the sun, as he
Creeps through the earth and heaven annually
In sideways mode and shines, as has been stated
By men of science who have formulated 730

The regions of the sky and set in place
The signs; or else because the air in space
Is closer here and there, and thus his light
Can easily pass through and scale the height
Of heaven: thus winter nights are lingering
And long until the gleam of day can bring
Us light; or maybe since for the same reason
There tends to be at every different season
A slower and a quicker fiery pace
To make the sun rise in a certain place. 740

The moon may shine struck by the sun's bright rays
And through the steady progress of the days
Induce that light piecemeal slowly to veer
Towards us as she quits that solar sphere
Until she faces him with fullest light
And sees him setting as she scales the height:
Then step by step, that light she has to hide,
The nearer to the sun we see her glide
From the opposing reason where exist
The zodiacal signs, as they insist 750

Who claim the moon is round and keeps below
The sun as on she travels. It's also
Possible she possesses her own light

As she revolves, while variably bright.
Another body, too, may move beside
The moon, in many ways as on they glide,
Obstructing and impeding her, although
It can't be seen because it has no glow.
It's possible that like a ball she might
Revolve, one half of her suffused with light, 760
And turn so that her phases are disclosed
In turn in order that we are exposed
To the part endowed with fire, then by degrees
She turns it to her back till no-one sees
That part (a Babylonian theory
With which other astronomers disagree,
As if another's doctrine can't be true
Or there's no decent rationale that you
Should choose this over that). And finally,
The reason a new moon can't always be 770
Created, shapes and phases newly set
Each day, the old cast off, another yet
Replacing it is hard to prove when we
See many things created fixedly.
The Spring, Venus, and Venus' harbinger,
Winged Cupid, marching on ahead of her,
Then Zephyr, and then Flora, scattering
The path before them all and covering
It all with brilliant hues and scents, next Heat
And dusty Ceres and the winds that beat 780
From northern lands and Autumn alongside
Bacchus, and then ensues a windy tide

And seasons, first Vertumnus, thundering high,
Then Auster, lord of lightning. By and by
The shortest day brings snows and numbing chill,
Then winter, chattering with cold. It will
Seem less surprising if the moon should be
Born and once more destroyed specifically
At some fixed time because that is the case
With many other things. Now you must face 790
The fact eclipses of the sun also,
And hidings of the moon, can let us know
A number of causes. For why should it be
That Moon can block the luminosity
Of the sun from earth, thrusting her head up high
With her dark orb and yet, as it glides by,
Another body also without light
Is thought incapable of this, too? And might
The sun at some fixed time be able, too,
To get rid of his fires and then renew 800
His light once through the heavens he has crossed
Places that hate his flames and thus has lost
Them for a while? Why can the earth deny
The moon her light while she is passing high
Above the sun, applying all her force
Upon him, while upon her monthly course
Through the clear-cut and conical shadows she
Glides on, while there's another entity
That cannot pass beneath the moon and stream
Above the sun and interrupt his gleam? 810
But if the moon shines with her own bright face,

Why should she not grow faint in some fixed place
Up in the heavenly skies while passing through
Regions that hate her light? To continue:
How all things might occur in the firmament
I've dealt with that we may be competent
In understanding how the sun can be
Moved on its course and though what energy
And cause, and how the moon goes on its course,
And how their light's obstructed and what force 820
Plunges us all in darkness as they seem
To wink and then with open eye to gleam
Once more, and therefore the world's infancy
And fields of tender earth again will be
My theme, what was thought fit to be created
In lands of light and to be delegated
To wayward winds. At first the grasses grew
About the hills and plains with their green hue
And all the blooming meadows shone out green,
And in some trees a great contest was seen, 830
As with full speed they raced to reach the air.
As on four-footed creatures feathers, hair
And bristles grow, so then the new-born earth
To undergrowth and herbage first gave birth,
And then, to implement her propagation,
She, generation after generation,
Made many mortal creatures differently
Depending on the breed. For obviously
No animal has fallen from the sky
While land-beasts did not ever occupy

Salt pools. It's right that Earth received the name
Of mother because out of her there came
All creatures. Even in our time the earth
To many living animals gives birth,
Fashioned by rain or warm rays that arise
From the sun. Thus it is less of a surprise
That there more and larger ones which grew
Back in the time when Earth and Air were new.
The winged beasts then hatched their young in spring,
Just as cicadas, hoping thus to bring 850
Life to their brood, in summer presently
Leave their neat husks. The earth, as you may see,
Bred mortals then for fields were very hot
And moist, and when was found a likely spot,
Then, rooted to the earth, many a womb
Would grow, and when in time the young would bloom
And break those roots, the moisture they would flee
And seek the air, and then, quite naturally,
Discharged through all the pores inside the earth,
Came milky liquid as, after a birth, 860
A woman will produce, because the flurry
Of nourishment is always in a hurry
To reach the breasts. The progeny was fed
By Earth, warmth gave them clothes, grass gave a bed,
Downy and soft. The infant world, we know,
Brought no intensive heat nor freezing snow
And there was no excessive windy weather;
For everything gains strength and grows together.
Again, it's right that Earth received the name

Of mother, for I've said all creatures came 870

From her, for every animal everywhere

In the great mountains and birds of the air

At fixed times she produced. But finally,

Worn out with age, she reached the boundary

Of giving birth, for nature's changed by age,

One stage emerging to another stage.

For nothing stays the same: all things migrate

And are compelled by Nature to mutate.

For one thing rots, becoming powerless

With age, another grows contemptuous. 880

So Earth can't bear what in the past she bore

But can bear what she could not bear before

And many were the monsters that the earth

Attempted to create, which at their birth

Sprang up prodigiously, and one of these

Had neither male nor female qualities

Completely, some *sans* feet, some handless, some

Produced without a mouth, totally dumb,

Some blind, some with their limbs all tightly stuck

Together, so that they had the ill luck 890

Of being constrained from going anywhere

Or doing anything, quite unaware

Of how to sidestep trouble or partake

Of what they needed. Such a huge mistake

In Nature! For she banned their growth, and so

They could not reach maturity and grow,

Find food or know of sexual intimacy,

For we see that we need society

So that we might together procreate
And future generations fabricate. 900

There must be food, and, next, a way for seeds
To go throughout the frame and serve its needs.
Both male and female must unite so they
May please each other in their sexual play.
So many breeds of animals must have died
Back then because those beasts had been denied
The power to provide posterity
With one more generation: what you see
Feeding upon life's breath must from the start
Have been protected by some cunning art 910

Or speed or courage. Many still remain
Among us and contribute to our gain
In our protection. Lions primarily
Have been protected by their bravery,
The fox by cunning and the stag by speed.
Those creatures that were sprung, though, from the seed
Of beasts of burden and the clever hound
That's ever watchful with a heart that's sound
In duty, sheep and oxen, Memmius,
Have been produced to be preserved by us. 920

For they have fled wild creatures eagerly,
Attaining peace and nourishment which we
Gave them for their responsibilities.
But those possessing no such qualities,
Who cannot live alone by their own will
Nor be of use to us that we might fill
Their bellies, keeping them unthreatened, lay

At the mercy of so many men for prey
And profit, hampered by the chains they wore
Till they became extinct. But no Centaur 930
Ever existed, and there cannot be
At any time among humanity
Two-bodied beasts with limbs that did not fit
Their bodies. Here is proof the dullest wit
May grasp. A horse is strongest when he's three
Years old; a boy, though, categorically,
Is not, for even then, when he's at rest
Asleep, he seeks his mother's milky breast.
But when a horse's power begins to wane
And life recedes, then boyhood starts to reign 940
And clothes his cheeks with down. So don't allow
That there were Centaurs that were made somehow
Of seeds of man and horse, or that a swarm
Of ravening hounds of hell could help to form
A half-fish Scylla or monstrosities
That are as incompatible as these;
Nor is it ever at the self-same time
They lose their bodily strength or reach their prime
Or fade with age or burn with ardency
Alike nor in their practices agree. 950
A goat on hemlock may grow fat despite
The fact that it could kill a man outright.
Since fire can scorch a lion and every kind
Of being made from flesh and blood combined,
How could it be that there's a prodigy
On earth, a triple-framed monstrosity,

A lion In front, a snake behind, a goat
In the middle, breathing fire out of its throat?
So he who thinks that when the sky and earth
Were new such creatures underwent their birth , 960
Depending on that empty 'novelty',
Could babble out his nonsense endlessly
With equal reason, saying that long ago
Across the earth gold rivers used to flow
And trees grew jewels and that every man
Had limbs so large that he could easily span
The seas on foot and turn the sky around
With his own hands. Many seeds indeed were found
When beasts were first created on the earth,
But there's no proof that anything gave birth 970
To creatures of mixed growth, their limbs combined
With limbs of creatures of a different kind.
Although so many plants and grains and trees
Abound, nevertheless not one of these
Is joined to something else, for everything
Evolves in its own way, surrendering
To Nature's laws. Besides, the race of men
Was so much hardier on the land back then,
Because the hard earth made it; for the race
Had larger and more solid bones to grace 980
The sinews that they might not be oppressed
By heat, cold or strange food or be distressed
By illness. So they passed their lives throughout
Millennia like all wandering beasts. No stout
Ploughman was there, none worked upon the land

Or sowed new seeds or, sickle in one hand,
Lopped branches from tall trees. They were content
With what the sun and showers of rain had sent
And what the earth produced. Primarily
They feasted from the acorn-laden tree; 990
And arbuté-cherries, which, when winter's due,
We now see ripen with a crimson hue,
Were even more abundant than we see
In present times. The flowering infancy
Of the world produced more kinds of nourishment:
Though they were hard to chew, they caused content:
Rivers and springs called out to quench one's thirst,
Just as today torrents of water burst
Down from great mountains, calling far and wide
To wild beasts that they might be satisfied. 1000
The woodland haunts where the Nymphs were wont to dwell
(Which, in their wanderings, everyone knew well)
They made their home, where rivulets would cross
The wet rocks as they dripped upon the moss
And welled and bubbled through the level land.
Making a fire they did not understand
Nor wearing animal skins, thus to evade
The elements; and mountain-caves they made
Their homes as well and woods; they hid away
In undergrowth to dodge the winds and stay 1010
Untouched by rain. Nor could they mediate
About the common good or regulate
Their intercourse with laws. What fortune brought
Each man would carry off, for he'd been taught

To be strong in himself. And lovers mated
In the woods, either since she was captivated
By joint desire or taken forcefully
With vehement lust or bribed (that bribe could be
Pears, berries or acorns). Supported by
Their powerful physiques, they would let fly 1020
Their stones and clubs at beasts: they overpowered
Many of them, for from but few they cowered
In hideaways. And at the close of day
Like hogs, quite naked, on the ground they lay,
Rolled up in leafage. Nor did they in fright
Cry out in yearning for the morning light
But, wrapped in sleep, they waited silently
Until the rosy face of dawn they'd see –
From childhood they had known that day and night
Take turns and therefore felt no awe or fright 1030
That light would be removed and night would last
Forevermore. No. something else would cast
A pall on them – wild beasts disturbed their rest:
For they would leave their rocky homes, distressed
To see a lion or foaming bear appear
At night, and leave their leaf-strewn beds in fear.
Yet not much more than now did men, with rue,
Depart from life's sweet light, although it's true
That one man or another would be trapped
By some wild beast as on his flesh it snapped: 1040
The forests, woods and mountains would resound
With groans as in those vicious jaws he found
A living tomb, while those who got away,

Though mangled, held their hands in their dismay
Over their ghastly wounds and prayed for death
With dreadful cries till they were reft of breath,
Not knowing medicines that could mend
Their wounds. One single day, though, would not send
Thousands of men to die on the battleground
And violent billows didn't blow around
Vessels and mariners to make them split
Upon the rocks. For back then all of it
Was pointless that such storms rose on the sea,
So all its empty threats it easily
Dismissed, and so nobody met his end
Through witchcraft since the sea was now his friend.
So navigation's wicked artistry
Lay hidden. In those days the scarcity
Of food caused death. But now its opposite
Is true – we're dying from excess of it.

1060

Back then men killed themselves unwittingly
With poison, but that poison skilfully
We give to others. Once folk had possessed
Huts, skins and fire and mankind had been blessed
With wedlock and had raised a family,
They fell into a pampered luxury:
Having discovered fire, they complained
About the cold more often; Venus drained
Their strength; the children used cajolery
To coax their parents; and eventually
Neighbours grew friendly in their eagerness
To shun wrongdoing and ferociousness,

1070

Seeking protection for all progeny
 And women, signifying haltingly
 By word and gesture that it is but fair
 To pity fragile people everywhere.
 But peace could not be made in every way,
 Although a good part (most of it, I'd say)
 Remained unblemished, otherwise the earth
 Would have been emptied of mankind and birth 1080
 Eradicated. Many sounds were brought
 To people's tongues; later convenience wrought
 The names of things, as infants' speechlessness
 Makes them rely on gestures to express
 Themselves, using a finger possibly
 To point out something they'd like one to see
 Each in his own way. Calves, before one sees
 Their horns stand out upon their heads, with these
 Will butt in anger, pushing viciously.
 Panthers' and lions' young similarly 1090
 Will use their feet and teeth when in a fight,
 Although they yet can barely kick or bite.
 All winged fledglings also we may see
 Try out their pinions' strength unsteadily.
 To think that someone gave out names, therefore,
 To things and people learned from him, what's more,
 Their first words is but muddle-headedness.
 For why should he give tongue to various
 Sounds and name everything, while equally
 Others could not? While in their colloquy 1100
 Folk used these titles, whence did they attain

The knowledge of their use? Whence did they gain
The power to learn their purposes and see
Them all in their mind's eye? For certainly
He hadn't got the influence to show
To them that these things they wanted to know.
Nor can one easily teach in any way
To men what should be carried out when they
Won't hear, unwilling to endure what he
Keeps dinning in their ears continually 1110
To no avail? What's so amazing, then,
That, having active sounds and tongues, all men
Distinguished everything by varying
Sounds that will suit what they're experiencing?
For all dumb beasts use different sounds to show
What they are feeling, be it fear or woe
Or joy. Molossian hounds growl angrily,
Teeth bared, when they're provoked, quite differently
Than when they loudly bark. But when their young
They lick affectionately with their tongue, 1120
Tossing or nipping them, as though intent
On gently swallowing them, their yelps are meant
Quite differently from when they loudly bay
When left alone at home or cringe away
From a blow. A horse is different when he neighs
Amid the mares while in his lusty days,
Struck with the spurs of love and snorting out
Through his wide nostrils just before a bout
Of wantonness, than when senility
Causes a neigh that quivers. Finally, 1130

Ospreys and hawks and divers, every race
Of birds that seek a life above the face
Of salt-sea waves cry in a different way
When, fighting for some food, they find their prey
Fights back, than other times. Their harsh-toned song
Some birds change with the weather, like the throng
Of ancient crows and rooks when, as they say,
They cry for wind or call for rain to spray.
Therefore, if animals, though they are mute,
Are made to give out different cries to suit 1140
Their moods, how much more natural would it be
That they, too, showed each feeling differently
Through sounds! If you should quietly wonder, then,
Lightning was first to send down fire to men,
Whence blazing flames spread out across the world.
For we see flames from high above us hurled,
Igniting many things whenever a blow
From heaven brought them heat. And yet, also,
If a tree with many branches happens to rest
Against another tree, fire is pressed 1150
From it by friction: sometimes there's a flash
Of burning flame as trunks and branches clash.
Either of these two causes could have brought
Fire to all mankind; the sun then taught
Us how to cook and soften food with flame
Since people saw that many things became
Mellow, defeated by the blazing rays
Of heat amid the fields. Then, as the days
Advanced, wise men taught people how to change

Their style of living and to rearrange 1160

Their ways. Kings founded cities and erected
Towers that their subjects might be protected;
Cattle and lands were, in conformity
With beauty, strength and ingenuity,
Divided up, for strength and beauty then
Were most important. Afterwards, by men
Was gold discovered, and wealth took from these
Strong, handsome folk their decency with ease;
No matter, in that case, how fair and strong

A man may be, a richer man he'll long 1170

To follow. But to live honourably,
A man possesses great prosperity
If he's content with little – that indeed
Is never lacking. People, though, felt need
Of fame and power that their fortune could
Be firmly set and being wealthy would
Give them a quiet life – but all in vain,
For in the upward struggle to attain
The peak of honour, they have made their way

A dangerous one, and even after they 1180

Came down, a thunderbolt would sometimes cast
Them into Tartarus and, like that blast,
Envy would scorch the summits frequently
And those above the rest, Accordingly,
It is much better to obey in peace
Than to desire to make your wealth increase
And govern kingdoms. Therefore let them sweat
In blood upon the narrow path to get

Their wealth and struggle wearily in vain,
Since from the lips of others they'll attain 1190
Their wisdom, chasing things from mere hearsay,
Not what they feel. This folly, though, today
Does not succeed, nor will it ever be
Successful any more than previously.
Kings, then, were slain; the pomp of yesterday
And those proud sceptres in the dust now lay.
Fine crowns beneath the feet of peasants, stained
With blood, now lay and bitterly complained
Of their lost honour: folk were keen to tread
On that for which they used to have such dread, 1200
So all things reached the dregs of disarray
As every man struggled to take away
The prize of high command. Then they were taught
To set up magistrates, and then they brought
In laws. Mankind then, weary of the taint
Of all the violence that they bore, grew faint
With feuding and were ready to agree
To strict statutes. For when men angrily
Set on revenge more keenly than was right
By law, mankind was weary of the sight 1210
Of violence. The fear of penalty
Taints life's rewards; bloodshed and injury
Ensnare each person and, for the most part,
Recoil upon the one who caused their start.
It is not easy for a man to glide
Straight through a peaceful life when he's defied
The bonds of common peace. Yet even though

He hides his deeds from all, he cannot know
That they will stay unseen. For it's been said
That many often, as they lie in bed, 1220
Will speak out loud or else, delirious
With fever, rave, their secret actions thus
Revealed. Now it is easy to explain
Why in great lands the gods have come to reign,
The cities filled with altars while great care
Was taken with the rites which everywhere
Flourish in mighty states, and every man
Feels awe and helps to raise new shrines to span
The world and bring to every celebration
His fellow-Romans. Every generation 1230
Of men in those days saw in their minds' eye,
And more in sleep, gods made conspicuous by
Their form and beauty. So they had no doubt
That they could feel, seeming to move about
And say fine things in keeping with the way
They looked and showed how strong they were. So they
Gave them eternal life, since they would see
A slew of like-shaped forms, especially,
However, since their power was so great
That they would be too hard to dominate. 1240
They guessed that they were steeped in happiness
Because their thoughts of death brought no distress,
And in their slumbers they would also see
Them doing wondrous things, all scathelessly.
They saw each sequence of the sky appear
And all the various seasons of the year

In strictest order, though they could not see
Their causes. So they found security
In leaving all to the gods. Up in the sky
They placed the gods' abode because on high 1250
The moon, the sky, the solemn stars, the night,
The torches and the flames, all shining bright,
Clouds, sun, rain, lightnings, hail and winds and snow,
Swift roars and rumbling thunderbolts all go,
Revolving. O unhappy humankind
That to the gods these actions they've assigned,
Yet bitter wrath as well! What groans did they
Give out, what wounds they left for us today,
Tears for the future! It's no piety
To cover up one's head regularly, 1260
Approach a stone and every shrine, descend
Upon the ground and to the gods extend
One's palms over an altar or to flood
That altar with the sacrificial blood
Of beasts while linking vow to vow; for he
Is pious who with pure tranquillity
Surveys all things. For when we look up high
Across the shining temples of the sky
And all its stars, when we think of the sun
And moon, and how they move, then every one 1270
Of us, already crushed by misery,
Discovers now one more anxiety
That the gods' immeasurable strength embraces us,
A strength that moves the stars in various
Motions – the question causes anxious care:

For was the world created? And is there
A limit that will let the world remain
Until it can no longer bear the strain
Of restless motion? Did the gods decree
Its walls, though, should live on eternally, 1280
Despising time's strong power? Is there a mind
That does not fear the gods in all mankind?
Whose limbs don't crawl with terror when a bolt
Of thunder shakes the earth with a shocking jolt
And rumblings run across the mighty sky?
Don't nations tremble, don't proud monarchs shy
Away in fear of the gods lest through some sin
Or haughty word grave time may usher in
Their punishment? When winds blow violently
And sweep an admiral into the sea, 1290
With troops and elephants, does he not crave
The gods' concord with vows thereby to save
Himself and pray that all the winds may cease
And favouring breezes bring him back to peace? –
In vain, for often in a furious gale
He gets entangled and is doomed to sail
Into the shoals of death. Humanity
Is ground down by some hidden energy
Which on the rods and axes of success
Appears to trample with derisiveness. 1300
When the whole earth trembles beneath us, when
Cities collapse or barely stand, why then
Men feel self-hate – and this is no surprise –
And leave it to the gods to supervise

All things, acknowledging their potency.
Now I will speak of the discovery
Of silver, copper, gold, iron and lead
When fire from the mountains came and spread
And scorched the forests, whether some lightning flashed
From heaven or else because in war men clashed, 1310
Burning them, thus to full the foe with fear,
Or, since the soil was rich, some wished to clear
The fat fields for their pasture, or that they
Might kill the wild beasts and enjoy their prey;
For there were hunts with springes and with flame
Before men fenced their glades and put up game
With packs of hounds. However that may be,
Whatever, with its grim cacophony,
Had brought about the blazing heat and burned
The forests to their very roots and turned 1320
The land to ash, the hollows of the earth
And her hot veins proceeded to give birth
To those five elements I named before,
Which oozed out and collected from her core.
When people saw their hues, coagulated
And radiating, they were captivated
By their smooth grace and saw they had the same
Contours as did the hollows whence they came,
And then they noted that each element
Could be dissolved by heat and thus be bent 1330
In different shapes and beaten, furthermore,
Into the finest edge and laid in store
As tools that they might cut down trees or hew

Timber or plane planks smooth, or puncture, too.
They tried to make these things initially
Of silver, gold and bronze (which they could see
Was just as tough), but it was all in vain
Because, though strong, they could not take the strain:
They found the work was all too rigorous.
Unlike the bronze, the gold was valueless, 1340
They thought, because its edge was far from keen,
But now bronze is disdained while gold is seen
As quite the best. Things change as seasons glide
On by: what once was prized will be denied
Its worth one day. Something that people flout
Will one day lose that taint and be sought out
As time goes by and, once discovered, thrive
And be extolled by every man alive.
Now you will recognize with little fuss
How iron was discovered, Memmius. 1350
In ancient times the arms with which one fought
Were hands, nails, teeth, stones, branches which were sought
From forest trees and broken off, then flame,
Once it was known. Then iron and bronze both came
Into man's ken – bronze first, since it was more
Easily worked, comprising a greater store.
Men tilled the earth with bronze, with bronze as well
Stirred up the waves of war and rushed pell-mell,
Inflicting dreadful wounds, and took away
Cattle and lands. Men readily gave way, 1360
When naked and unweaponed, to a foe

Well-armed. The iron sword would slowly grow
In stature, while the scythe of bronze would fill
Mankind with scorn, and they began to till
The earth with iron, and the odds of war
Were equal, as they had not been before.
In ancient times a man would mount his horse
In arms and with the bridle steer his course
And fight from there before he was to face
The hazards of war while his two steeds would race 1370
Before his chariot. There was a stage
Of four-horsed chariots before that age,
And chariots equipped with scythes. And then
Lucanian oxen – elephants – with men
On turrets on their backs, a hideous mob,
With snakes for hands, well taught to do the job
Of hoodwinking the foe while suffering
The wounds of war. Discord kept ushering
In further ills to fright the souls of men
And the terrors of warfare again and again 1380
Would grow. They tried to further their fierce wars
With bulls and beat the foe with vicious boars.
Some let slip lions to the enemy
With men to exercise their mastery
With arms and shackles - but in vain once more,
For, heated with the sight of blood and gore,
They ran amok, confusing everything
On either side, their fierce manes quivering.
The horses at the noise were terrified,
Nor could their riders calm them down or guide 1390

Them at the enemy, while angrily
The lionesses leapt haphazardly,
Attacking anyone they chanced to find
And, turning round, would lash at those behind
And maul them to the ground with their strong jaws
And hold them, weak with wounds, with curving claws.
Bulls tossed and trampled other bulls, and they
Ripped at the horses, for their horns would lay
Them flat, and raked the earth up threateningly.
Boars tore at other boars and furiously 1400
Splashed broken weapons with their blood and wrought
Promiscuous mayhem on whoever fought,
Riders or infantry. The steeds would swerve
Aside to dodge the wildly lunging curve
Of tusks or paw the air, but bootlessly,
For, hamstrung, they'd collapse and heavily
Cover the ground. If men before had thought
The horses amply trained, yet when they fought
They saw them growing heated with the flight,
The terror, tumult, uproar and the blight 1410
Of wounds and could not bring them back, for they
Would scatter far and wide beyond the fray,
Just like the elephants, so lacerated
With weapons after they had mutilated
So many of their kind. But did they do
All this? I barely trust it can be true
That, after such destruction fell on all,
They could not have believed this would befall;
You might maintain this happened, though, elsewhere

In different ways in any place you care 1420

To think of. Yet they didn't go to war

In hope of conquering but wishing for

A chance to disconcert the enemy,

Though they themselves would die through paucity

Of arms and numbers. Tied clothes people wore

Before knitwear, though iron came before

The latter since they needed it to fit

Upon the loom, and smoothness, lacking it,

Could not have been achieved due to a lack

Of treadles, shuttles, spindles and the clack 1430

Of leash-rods. Men before all womankind

Plied wool (because the male sex leaves behind

The female sex in their ability),

Till dour farmers called indignity

Upon it, and the men let women ply

The wool and turned to toil to fortify

Their bodies. Nature, though, instructed men

In the art of sowing in the fields, for when

Berries and acorns fall, sequentially

A swarm of seedlings lies beneath the tree, 1440

Whence shoots into the boughs were introduced

And in the fields new slips were then produced;

And men received a certain delectation

In finding different ways of cultivation,

Wild fruits becoming pliant when they found

They welcomed friendly tillage in the ground.

As time went by, they made the forests go

Yet higher in the hills, the place below

Left for their tillage, so that there might be
Crops, meadows, pools, streams and a quantity 1450
Of fertile vineyards and that a grey-green
Region of olives burgeoning between
And over every hill and dale and plain,
As now you see upon the whole terrain
A picturesque miscellany laid out
With fruit-trees and plantations set about.
To imitate birds' trilling notes came long
Before man could delight his ears with song.
Winds whistling through the reeds taught men to blow
Through hemlock-stalks, and slowly they would know 1460
To place their fingers on a pipe they made
From reeds which they'd found in some forest-glade
Where shepherds took their solitary ease
In the open air, and play sweet elegies.
These airs they took delight in when replete
With food, for that is when all things are sweet.
Often with friends on the soft grass hard by
A stream beneath a tall tree they would lie –
A joy with little cost – especially
When the weather smiled and floral greenery 1470
Abounded. Then the order of the day
Was peals of pleasant laughter, chat and play,
For then the rustic muse was vigorous.
Then, prompted by a joyous playfulness,
They'd put on wreaths and march, though raggedly,
And beat the earth, full of hilarity:
All things were thriving, wonderful and new,

And, when they were awake, this was their due
 For when thy slept – to warble songs and play
 The reed-pipe, whence the watchmen of today 1480
 Keep the tradition, and they have been taught
 Many tempos, although it has never brought
 No more enjoyment to them than was felt
 By those who came from Mother Earth and dwelt
 In woodlands. For what stares us in the face,
 Unless we've seen something with greater grace
 Before, gives great delight and seems to be
 The best, till what seems better usually
 Spoils that which modifies our liking for
 What's ancient. Men thought acorns then a bore 1490
 And left their old beds, strewn with leaves and grass;
 Clothes made of wild beasts' pelts now did not pass
 Muster: great envy all those years before
 Provoked, I think, the death of him who wore
 It first through treachery and it was torn
 Apart so it no longer could be worn.
 First pelts, then gold and purple clothes, therefore,
 Plagued men and wearied all of them with war.
 The blame lies mostly, I believe, in us –
 Though earthborn people found it torturous 1500
 To wear a pelt in winter, nonetheless
 Purple with gold designs brings no distress
 While we can use a poor man's covering.
 In vain mankind is ever labouring,
 Consumed with empty cares, obviously
 Because it does not know the boundary

Of ownership and also does not know
To what extent real happiness can grow.
And by degrees man's lived upon the seas
And stirred up billows of hostilities. 1510

Those watchful sentinels, the moon and sun,
Who gleam around the heaven's dominion,
Taught men that all the seasons come around,
All done in order that is fixed and sound.
Now men had citadels, well fortified,
And earth was meted out and classified.
Now sailing-ships were seen upon the seas,
And friends and allies formed confederacies.

Bards glorified great deeds in poetry
(Letters had been devised just recently) 1520

So we cannot look back on yesterday
But that our reasoning will show the way.
Roads, weapons, agriculture, navigation,
Decrees, all kinds of clothes, fortification,
Life's prizes, luxuries from first to last,
Verse, art, smooth statues dexterously cast –
All these improved as mankind gradually
Progressed through practice and capacity.

Thus by degrees time brought us everything,
Which was revealed to us by reasoning. 1530

By intellect all these things man could see
Until they had attained their apogee.

