LUCRETIUS VI

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

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

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

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

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

A teeming forest. It can happen, too,
That a fierce wind will rush unswervingly
Into a cloud and break it. We can see
Down here what it can do, for though it's less
Of a tempestuous nature, nonetheless
It wrenches lofty trees out of the ground.
Among the clouds, as well, waves can be found,
Which, as they break, growl out a roaring sound,
Which happens in deep rivers and around
The ocean's waves. Thunder, too, breaks out loud
When lightning's burning fire falls from one cloud
To another cloud, which, if, whenever it takes
The fire in, is soaked with water, makes
A dreadful noise, meanwhile immediately
Destroying it, just as similarly
A furnace's white-hot iron, when it's downed
In ice-cold water, makes a hissing sound.
To take this further, if the cloud were drier
When it received the lightning-stroke, the fire
Will loudly kindle it immediately,
As if the laurelled peaks were mightily
Attacked by wind-blown flames; for it's a fact
That nothing burns like laurel when it's cracked
By flame on Phoebus' altar in Delphi.
Again, a noise in huge clouds up on high
Is made by cracks of ice and hail; for when
The wind packs all of them together, then
The clouds are crushed together narrowly
And mixed with hail. Lightning, additionally,

Occurs when clouds clash and send seeds of flame
Abroad, for stones and steel will do the same
And strike out sparks of light. The reason why
The ear hears thunderclaps after the eye
Has seen the lightning is that things take longer
To reach the ear. To make your judgment stronger,
If you see someone cutting down a tree
Far off, before you hear the thud you see
The stroke; in the same way, before we hear
The thunder it's the lightning that is clear
To sight, though both occurred concurrently.
Thus with their rapid light clouds comparably
Tinge places, and hailstorms with a quivering burst
Will flash and dazzle. When a wind has first
Entered a cloud and, moving more and more,
Congealed it, as I have explained before,
It becomes hotter by its very speed,
Like all things else – a bullet will indeed
Melt when it's cast afar – and when it breaks
The black cloud, by its violent force it makes
Its seeds of fire squeeze out, the very same
That caused the winking flickerings of flame;
And then ensues the sound, which strikes the ears
Somewhat more tardily than what appears
Before the eyes. It is a proven fact
That this will take place when the clouds compact,
Piled one upon the other massively;
So do not be deceived because we see
From here how wide they are as they extend

Far upwards in the sky. So do but lend
Your eyes to how the clouds can be conveyed
Across the mountains where they are displayed
In heaps, pressed from above and lying still,
The winds wrapped all around them. Then you will
Behold that mass, able to recognize
The stone-built caves which, should a storm arise,
The winds fill up, complaining noisily
That by the clouds they're kept in custody,
Menacing like wild animals. This way
And that they growl there, hoping that they may
Find a way out as through the clouds they churn
The many seeds of fire and finally burn
And shatter them. Another reason why
The golden flowing flame can swiftly fly
To earth is that the clouds have to possess
Many seeds of fire. Thus when they're moistureless
Their colour mostly flames and shines. Indeed
From the sun's light they must gain many a seed,
Thus blushing red. So when the wind apace
Drives them into a tightly confined space,
They squeeze out seeds and make the flames shine bright.
And also when the clouds grow thin, there's light.
For when a wind that's tranquil has broadcast
Them here and there as they go gliding past,
The seeds that make the lightning have to fall,
And then the lightning makes no noise at all
And does not terrify. A thunderbolt
Has marks of heat burnt in and strokes that jolt

And dents that breathe foul sulphur; these are all
The marks of fire, not breezes or rainfall.
And often houses' roofs, additionally,
They set alight, assuming mastery
Over their rooms as well. This most refined
Of all the fires has nature so combined
With elements so rapid and so small
It can't be blocked by anything at all.
The powerful thunderbolt can pass straight through
A house's walls, as sounds and voices do,
And pierces stone and bronze and instantly
Melts bronze and gold, and by its energy
Wine will evaporate in a heartbeat
Yet keep the vessels safe, because the heat
With ease tempers the earthenware, and so
It makes it pervious and thus will flow
Into the jar itself, then far and near
Dissolves the wine's first seeds. This, it's quite clear,
The sun can't do for ages, even though
Its quivering blaze is powerful: for so
Rapid and strong it is. I'll tell you now
How thunderbolts have been produced and how
They have the energy to split and burn
Down towers with one stroke, to overturn
Houses, rip beams, topple to the ground
Monuments, kill men and animals all around,
And other things, and I will not delay
With promises. We must believe that they
Were first produced from thick clouds piled on high,

Since they were never issued when the sky
Is peaceful or when the clouds are lightly packed.
Indeed there is no doubt, for many a fact
Can prove it, since the clouds all mass together
When thunder happens, and we wonder whether
Hell's empty of all darkness everywhere,
Which now has filled the caverns of the air.
To such a degree beneath the hideous night
Of cloud there hangs the face of horrid fright,
As the tempest starts to forge her bolts. Besides,
Often a black cloud will affect the tides –
A pitchy flood, with darkness stuffed on high,
Falls down upon the waters from the sky
And brings with it a jet-black squall which teems
With thunderbolts and storms and winds and streams
Of flame, thus making people here below
Shiver with fear and run for shelter. So
We must believe the tempests have to surge
High over us, for clouds could not submerge
The earth with so much black unless each one
Was piled on many others that the sun
Would be blocked out. Nor could cascades of rain
Oppress us so that every stream and plain
Would swim in flood unless the sky were packed
With clouds piled high above us. So, in fact,
In such a case winds blow and fires flare
With rumblings and lightnings everywhere.
I said just now that hollow clouds contain
Many seeds of heat and therefore they must gain

Warmth from rays of the sun. And therefore, when
The wind collects them in one place and then
Has pressed out many seeds of torridness
And with that fire begins to coalesce,
The whirlwind goes into that narrow place
And turns itself about inside the space
And hones the thunderbolt. The wind indeed
Is kindled in two ways, first by its speed
And then by contact. The wind's energy
Heightens its heat and the intensity
Of the fire thrusts in, while the bolt, now fit
For action, as it were, will promptly split
The cloud, and then a rapid flame will fly
With flashing lights, and then, up in the sky,
A loud crash follows, and the firmament
Appears to overwhelm it as it's rent
Apart, then tremors in the sky assail
The earth and in the sky murmurings trail
And almost all the tempest with the jolt
Quivers, and roars come from the thunderbolt.
Then heavy rain ensues, and everywhere
There seems to be but rain throughout the air.
The torrent from that cloudburst and the blast
Of wind that it discharges is so vast,
When sound and flames fly forth. Sometimes, also,
A force of wind is stirred up and will blow
And fall upon a cloud that is replete
With a full-formed thunderbolt, whole and complete,
And, once the wind has burst it, instantly

A fiery vortex falls, a thing that we
Call thunderbolt. It can occur elsewhere
According to the force employed. And there
Have been times when a wind has been conveyed
Sans fire but has ignited as it made
Its lengthy trek through space, and, as it flew,
Lost certain bodies too large to pass through
The air equally well, and from the air
Itself scraped tiny ones which mingled there
With it, producing fire in their flight;
In the same way a bullet will ignite
And cast off many cold bodies in its course.
Fire is created by the very force
Of the blow, when cold winds strike. How can this be?
Well, when the wind has smitten violently,
Then from the winds heat elements may flow
As well as from that which received the blow;
When stone is struck by iron, out fire flies,
Where seeds do not the less homogenize
Since iron's cold. A thing, then, must be hit
And kindled by a thunderbolt if it
Is fit for flames. No wind may totally
Be cold if it's been sped down forcefully
From heaven, but if it's not first lit by flame
As it goes on its way, yet all the same
It must be warm and mixed with heat when it
Arrives. The swiftness and the heavy hit
Inflicted by the bolt (they usually
With such a fall move expeditiously)

Occurs because among the clouds a force
Is stirred up and embarks upon a course
Of rapid movement: when, subsequently,
The cloud can’t hold back the intensity,
The force is pressed out and is therefore flown
Remarkably, like missiles which are thrown
From catapults. The elements are small
And smooth, however, so it’s not at all
An easy task for something to impede
A thing with such a substance since with speed
It penetrates the narrow ways; and thus
It smoothly flies with rapid impetus
While rarely checked. All weights are naturally
Thrust downwards always; a velocity
Is added, though, when it inflicts a blow
As well and makes the first momentum grow
In weight, thus with more speed and violently
Disintegrating every entity
It meets that tries to bar it with delay.
And since it rushes from a long, long way,
It must keep getting faster as it grows
In strength by moving, stiffening the blows.
Its seeds are carried thus, as one may say,
Into one place as they roll on their way
And from the air itself it possibly
Draws bodies which provoke velocity
With blows. Nor does it cause any distress
To everything it meets in its progress,
Because the fire, being fluid, passes through

Their pores. And many it transfixes, too,
Because its very particles have lighted
Upon the points where everything's united.
It melts both bronze and gold immediately
Because it's made of bodies terribly
Minute and elements so smooth that they
Can very easily effect a way
Within and, once it's found its way inside,
Loosen all bonds. It is at autumntide
When all the regions of the firmament,
Set with its shining stars, is usually rent
With shaking all around, as is the earth,
And when the springtime brings its flowers to birth.
For in the cold fires fail, and when it's hot
The winds are lacking and the clouds are not
So dense. So when the temperature's between
The two, all causes of the bolt are seen
To be combined. For the year's choppy seas
Mingle together cold and heat – for these
Are both essential for a cloud to bring
A bolt to life – so that in everything
There's discord, and the wildly billowing air
With fires and winds engages everywhere.
So springtime is when warmth must say adieu
To cold and so a battle must ensue
Between those unlike things as they compete
In wild confusion; then when the last heat
Mixed with the early cold has come around,
Which we call autumn time, conflict is found

And bitter winters come into a fight
With summers. That's the reason why it's right
That they're called choppy seas. Thus it's no wonder
That in that season there is so much thunder,
With turbulent tempests stirred up in the air
Since all's confusion with well-matched warfare
On either side, as flames are coalesced
With winds and water. Thus you may digest
The nature of the thunderbolt and see
The role it plays through its intensity,
Not by unrolling scrolls to find a spell
And vainly search for signals that can tell
The gods' intent, to learn how fire came
And into which quarter it turned its flame,
And how it has pierced walls and how got back
And what's the harm inflicted by a crack
Of thunder. If the heavens are shaken by
The gods with dreadful noise up in the sky,
Who cast their fire at will, why don't they see
That when an execrable felony
Has been committed that they ought to clout
The man who did it, making him breathe out
Sulphurous flames, his breast pierced through, to show
A lesson to mankind? Why rather, though,
Should guiltless men in a tornado's flame
From heaven be burned? Why do they vainly aim
At deserts? Is it that they're practising
For other punishments and strengthening
Their muscles? Why allow a powerful jolt

Against the earth from Jupiter's thunderbolt?
And why does Jupiter himself not spare
That thunderbolt and cast it from the air
Upon his foes? Why does he never cast
His bolt on earth and sound his thunder-blast
From a clear sky? Does he instead descend
Into the clouds himself once they ascend
And only after that, when he's close by,
Direct his thunderbolt and see it fly?
Why does he strike the sea? And what has he
Against the waves, the vast immensity
Of water and the swimming plains? What's more,
If for us to be on the lookout for
His bolt is his desire, why does he not
Provide a way to see it when it's shot?
But if his wish is unexpectedly
To crush us with his fire, why then does he
Strike from where we can see it, and thereby
Avoid it, and prepare up in the sky
The dark with rumblings and a dreadful din?
How is it you believe he can shoot in
Many directions at one time? Maybe
You'll say it's never done, but actually
It's often done and must be done indeed
So that, as showers and rain pour down to feed
Many regions of the earth, many bolts will fall
All at the self-same time. Now, last of all,
Why does he smash shrines of divinities
And even his own illustrious territories?

Why crush many a fine-wrought effigy
And rob his statues of their majesty,
Inflicting dreadful wounds on them? And why
Is he wont to attack places on high?
Why is most of his fire seen upon
The mountain-tops? Well then, to carry on,
It's easy from these thoughts to comprehend
How what the Greeks call *presteres* descend
Into the ocean. For occasionally
A kind of column drops into the sea,
Surrounding which the strong winds agitate
The waters, which begin to fulminate;
Ships caught in it were perilously cast
About. This happens when the furious blast
Of winds at times can't burst the cloud it tries
To burst but thrusts it, giving it the guise
Of a column, to the billows of the sea
As though it were, degree by small degree,
Thrust by an arm and fist; and when the gust
Of wind tears it asunder, it is thrust
Out of the cloud and down into the sea,
And on the waves it bubbles wondrously.
The whirlwind twists and brings the cloud with it
And when the surface of the sea is hit
By that full cloud, the wind aggressively
Dives through the water, stirring up the sea,
And loudly makes it boil. Its vortex snakes
Into the clouds sometimes, where then it rakes
Their seeds together and then imitates

The Greek-named *presteres* as it rotates
Down from the sky. On landing, it's dispersed
And violently vomits forth a burst
Of storm and whirlwind. But since it is rare
That this occurs, and also , here and there,
Mountains get in the way, more frequently
We see it on the wide and open sea
And there's nothing above it but the sky.
The clouds amass together up on high
When many flying bodies suddenly
Meet up: they're rougher and, to some degree,
Entangled yet can coalesce. These mould
Small clouds at first and yet they still can hold
Together and by combination grow
And then are borne upon the winds that blow
Until a savage tempest should arise.
The nearer are the mountains to the skies,
The more, through dusty clouds, will every peak
In that high place with dusky blackness reek
Since, when the clouds first form, before the eye
Sees them, so thin are they, they're carried high
By winds up to the peaks. Now they're amassed
In a much larger pack and can at last
Be seen, appearing simultaneously
To fly into the ether. We can see,
When we ascend a mountain, that the air
Abounds with windy breezes everywhere.
Besides, that many particles appear
Across the entire sea is made quite clear

When clothes are hung up on the shore and take
The sticky moisture in and therefore make
It likelier that many bodies may
Surge up together from the salty spray
And swell the clouds above, for we may see
That there exists a consanguinity
Between these moistures. We can see, as well,
From rivers and the earth itself a swell
Of clouds and steam arising, in this way
Exhaled like breath and bringing an array
Of darkness as they thus suffuse the sky,
Uniting as they gradually supply
The clouds; for heat drives through the firmament
And thus, packed close, a weave of clouds is blent.
The bodies that create this hullabaloo
Of clouds and flying storms enter the blue
From outside. For their number I have proved
Is infinite and shown how fast they're moved
In flight and that they instantaneously
Can travel through a space that cannot be
Imagined. No surprise, then, if a squall
And murkiness can in no time at all
Cover the sea and land with clouds so great,
Since all the elements can navigate
Their way through all the passages of the air
And through the breathing-channels everywhere
Around us. Listen now as I explain
How in the clouds the moistures of the rain
Increase together and how showers fall,

Sent down upon the earth. So, first of all,
There rises from the earth full many a seed
Of water with the clouds, you will concede,
From many things, and they together grow
As blood, sweat and all moisture we must know
Grows with our bodies. Often clouds will pull
Much water from the sea, like strands of wool,
As by the winds they're carried. In this way
From all the rivers water's snatched away
Into the clouds. And when from here and there
The seeds and clouds unite, while everywhere
They grow, the clouds, now packed together, try
To oust the moisture in two ways: they fly
Together, aided by the breezes' might,
And when a greater mass of clouds, packed tight,
Than usual is collected, from on high
They downwards press and make the showers fly
Abroad. And if these clouds are rarefied
By breezes or become somewhat untied,
Struck by the sun's great heat, they then secrete
Their rainy moisture, just as wax will heat
And melt above a fire and attain
Liquid. There's a fierce downpour of rain
When clouds are pressed together violently
Both by the wind and their own energy.
But when the seeds of water move, the rain
Is wont to be persistent and remain
For a long time, and storm-rack on storm-rack
And cloud on cloud from every region stack

While borne along and from above they stream
And everywhere the earth breathes back the steam.
When the sun shines amidst the gloomy squall
Against the clouds from which the showers fall,
A rainbow stands amid the murkiness.
There are some other things that coalesce
Inside the clouds and some which live and grow
Above us, winds and hail and frost and snow
And powerful ice which makes the waters freeze
And curb the eager rivers – how all these
Are made and why is easy to find out
And see in your mind's eye once you've no doubt
About all of the elements' qualities.
The reason for earthquakes' occurrences
Now learn. And, in the first place, you must know
That, as the sky above, the earth below
Is full of windy caverns which possess
Many lakes and pools and a great wilderness
Of rocks and cliffs. And so we must surmise
Beneath the earth's back many a river lies
Hidden that rolls its waters violently
And moves its rocks; for facts demand that she
Be everywhere herself. If this is so
And these things are attached to her below,
And each cavern with age deteriorates,
The upper earth trembles and oscillates
With some disaster; mountains start to fall,
And with the massive shock the tremblings crawl
Both far and wide at once – and well they may

Since buildings by the road tremble and sway
When lightweight wagons pass, which will also,
If a stone should jolt the wheels, as on they go,
Jump upwards. And sometimes when from the ground
After some time a giant mass is found
To roll into a lake, the earth also,
Jogged by the water's waves, moves to and fro,
Just as a vessel sometimes can't remain
Immobile if the water can't refrain
From moving too. When winds beneath the ground
Desert one place and vehemently pound
Against the lofty caves, into that course
The headlong wind is making with great force
The earth will lean. The buildings, as they rise
In their construction up into the skies,
Incline, beams overhanging and prepared
To go. However, some people are scared
To think that for the great world's population
A period of total desolation
Is waiting, though a looming mass they see
Over the earth. Yet if increasingly
The winds should blow, no force could hold the world
In limbo, keeping it from being hurled
Into perdition. But, because they wane
In turns, gain force, revive and blow again,
The earth makes idle threats more frequently
Than ever she effects calamity.
She makes a forward lean, then with a spring
Moves back again, meanwhile recovering

The equilibrium she had before.
And that's how buildings totter, the top more
Than the foundation. When a blast of air
Or wind should blow – it doesn't matter where,
Above the earth itself or underground –
And fly into the caves and whirl around
And loudly growl, the force it agitates
And drives it outwards as it lacerates
The earth and formulates a great crevasse.
At Syrian Sidon this once came to pass,
And Aegium, when an earthquake overthrew
Them with that force of air. Many others, too,
Have fallen thus, and many have sunk down
Into the ocean's depths and caused to drown
The populace. But should it not break out,
The air and wind are scattered all about,
Plague-like, through all the openings that lie
Beneath the earth, and tremors start thereby,
Just as we shake with cold unwittingly.
And therefore a two-fold anxiety
Affects the citizens, because they dread
The lofty houses and the caverns spread
Beneath the earth lest nature suddenly
Tears all asunder and confusingly
Opens her gaping jaws and tries to fill
The earth with ruin and all kinds of ill.
So let them all think that the earth and sky
Can't be corrupted and will never die;
Yet sometimes peril adds a goad of fear

That suddenly the earth will disappear
Beneath our feet. Men wonder why the sea
Is not increased in volume naturally,
For many waters flow into the tide
As many rivers run from every side.
Add wandering showers, too, and storms that fly
Onto all seas and lands out of the sky,
And all the ocean's springs: yet if you weigh
The sea with all things else you'll find that they
Amount to just one drop. Accordingly,
Don't think it so surprising that the sea
Does not increase. Besides, the sun's heat draws
A lot away from it – another cause
For doubt. Indeed we see wet garments dried
By the sun, and yet the seas spread far and wide
Beneath us, and yet even though the sun
Takes but a sip from it in any one
Location, yet a superfluity
He'll take away from that expanse of sea.
Much moisture's swept away from the sea's face
By winds, since we can often find no trace
Of wet in roads after one night and see
Soft mud massing in crusts. For recently
I've shown much moisture's taken away as well
By clouds descending on the ocean's swell:
Across the world they spray it everywhere
When it is raining and the breezes bear
The clouds along with them. Now finally,
The earth is porous, girdling the sea:

So, since into the sea the waters course,
The salt sea likewise must exude perforce
Onto the land. The pungency is strained,
And water oozes back till it's attained
Each river's source, whence in a moving mass
Over the earth once more it then may pass
Along its marked-out path. Now in what way
Mt. Etna breathes out fury I will say.
For it was no familiar devastation
Attending that fierce tempest's domination
In Sicily's fields, attracting all the eyes
Of neighbouring folk, who saw up in the skies
The regions of the heavens sparkling
And smoking as they stood there quivering
In panic that another tragedy
Was in the plans of nature. You must be
Diligent in these matters and survey

All quarters everywhere so that you may
Remember the profundity of all
We see and recognize how very small
A fraction of the world is just one sky –

Less than one man when he is measured by
The whole earth. If you keep this steadily
In mind, discerning it with clarity,
You'll cease to wonder at a multitude
Of things. For which of us is in the mood
For wonder if a fever should assail
Our bodies with its heat or we should ail
With something else? A foot will suddenly
Swell up or we will feel some agony
In teeth or eyes or that accursed thing
Erysipelas, which burns us, slithering
Across our limbs, because assuredly
Seeds do exist in many an entity,
And foul diseases from the earth and air
Are in sufficient numbers that they flare
Immeasurably. Therefore there's a supply
Of everything out of the earth and sky
From infinite space, we must believe, and so
The earth can quiver suddenly to and fro
And over land and sea can whirlwinds rush
And in abundance Etna's fires can gush
And heavens burst in a blaze, and heavily
Tempests can pour, when incidentally
The waters' seeds for that effect have massed.
"But much too huge is that tempestuous blast."
Alright, but any river seems to be
The largest to a man who formerly
Has never seen a larger; it's the same
With trees or men, and everyone may claim

That all things of all kinds that he may see
Are huge because they're bigger yet than he
Has seen before, though sky and sea and land
Are but a modicum if they are scanned
With all there is. But now I'll clarify
How Etna's flames are rouse that they might fly
Out of the furnaces. Primarily
The mountain's hollow, held up principally
By flinty caverns, where there's wind, which air
Invigorates by flying everywhere.
And when the wind's grown hot and savagely
Heated the rocks in its vicinity,
The earth as well, it darts without delay
Quick flames, rises and makes its fiery way
Into the mountain's throat. The fires are,
Along with all their sparks, scattered afar
So that their thick, black smoke may emanate
As well as boulders of a wondrous weight.
You may be sure such is the energy
That air possesses. Furthermore, the sea
Around much of the mountain's roots will break
Its waves and, with a sucking sound, will make
Its surf recede; caves from this sea, below
The earth, into the maw of the mountain go.
Wind mixed with water, then, we must admit,
Enters, the facts of the case compelling it
To pierce through from the ocean whence it came
And to extinguish and lift high the flame
And cast up rocks and raise out of the sea

Sand-clouds. Upon the very apogee
Are craters, as they're called in Sicily
(We call them throats or mouths). Additionally,
There are a lot of things for which we name
Not one but many causes; all the same,
One of them is the true cause: for, let's say,
You see a man's corpse lying far away –
Perhaps you think you should enumerate
All causes of his death lest you don't state
The actual one. You could not prove a blade,
The cold, poison or some disease had made
The final blow, but we will surely find
The cause of death was something of this kind.
In many other things like views we state.
The Nile's the only river in full spate
Near summer. For it irrigates the land
Mid-season since the stream is forced to stand
By northerly winds which at the mouth appear
(They're called Etesian at that time of year):
They blow against it, hold it and impel
The waters to the channel. It is well
Beyond a doubt that those sharp blasts are rolled
From all the polar stars of northern cold
And blow against the current. From that land
Of heat, the Nile flows south where there are tanned
Black tribes baked by the sun. Maybe, as well,
Great mounds of sand pile up against the swell
And block the mouth: the winds stir up the sea,
Which drive the sand inward; accordingly

The outlet of the river is more barred:
Thus the descending waters find it hard
To flow. There may be also at its head
More rain then when the Etesian winds have sped
To drive the clouds together there. You may
Be sure, when to the regions of noonday
They're pushed, the clouds are violently compressed,
At last collected on a mountain crest.
Perhaps the river grows straight from the heart
Of Ethiopian peaks, whence clouds depart
Out to the plains through the intensity
Of the sun's melting rays. Listen to me
As the Avernian regions and their lakes
I tell of. First of all, the region takes
Its name from the fact that it's a dreadful threat
To birds which, flying over it, forget
How they should use their wings and, slackening
Their sails, fall through the ether, plummeting,
Their necks limp, into water or the ground,
As nature wills it. This region is found
Near Cumae, where the mountains up on high
Reek, with rank sulphur filled and shrouded by
Hot springs. In Athens there's another place,
High on the citadel, where you may face
Tritonian Pallas' shrine, the fostering
Athene, whither no crow will take wing,
Not even when an offering is there
Upon the altar. They take so much care
To flee, not, as the Grecian bards have sung,

Due to their vigil – no, its quality
Itself repels them. Also history
Says such a place in Syria is found –
As soon as beasts set foot upon the ground,
It makes them fall down heavily as though
Slain sacrifices to the gods below.
But these are nature's work – where they arose
And what produced them everybody knows.
And so the gates of Orcus cannot be
Within those regions and no deity
Of Hell can draw souls into the domain
Of Acheron, just as some folk maintain
Swift stags can draw a serpent from its lair
By breathing. Logic, you must be aware,
Proves this is false. I strive to speak what's true.
First, as I've frequently explained to you,
There are so many different entities
Upon the earth, and several of these
(Like food) aid life, but many strike us dead
With maladies. As I have also said,
Each animal has a very different need
From others for the life that it must lead,
For every one is structured differently.
A many a pernicious entity
Enters the ears and nose, rough to the touch
And noxious; many, too, are very much
Not to be touched, looked at or tasted. You
May see how many things harm humans, too.

First, there is cast a shade so threatening
From certain trees that they can often bring
On headaches should you lie there on the ground.
On Helicon's mountain- peaks there can be found
A tree whose vile stench kills a fellow flat
If he should smell its flower. You must know that
The earth has many kinds of seeds which she
Keeps hold of and then mingles variously
And passes on. A new-extinguished light
Offends the nose and overpowers quite
At once a man who customarily
Foams at the mouth and falls. The heavily-
Scented castor makes a woman fall
Asleep again as she lets go of all
Her dainty work, if she has smelt it when
She had her monthly period. And then,
A lot of things loosen the limbs and shake
The spirit. Once again, if you should take
Too long a hot bath after a full meal
You may, while still immersed, easily keel
Over. The heavy fumes of charcoal easily
Can creep into the brain lest formerly
One drinks some water. Should a fever take
Possession of a man, wine's smell will make
A corpse of him. Do you not see that Earth
Itself has to our sulphur given birth,
And with its filthy odour asphalt grows
In lumps together. Then again, when those
Who mine silver and gold, examining

The earth below us, o how everything
Reeks in Scaptensula! Those mines of gold –
What kinds of devilry do they all hold
And breathe out! And the men – what kind of hue
Do they take on! What do they look like! You
Must see and hear how soon their death will be,
Their forces spent, since of necessity
They must keep working. All the streams breathed out
From the earth go forth and wander all about
The open sky. Avernus thus must send
Its deadly power up in the sky to end
The lives of birds, contaminating part
Of heaven: thus when birds should chance to dart
Thither, they're caught by poison they can't see
And maybe fall straight down unswervingly
To where the breath flew up so that same breath
May make the coup de grâce and clinch their death.
It seems to cause a giddiness at first,
But afterwards, when they have surely burst
Into those poison springs, their life as well
Must be spewed forth, because within that Hell
Much evil lurks. Sometimes the power there
That drives that exhalation parts the air
Between the birds and earth so that a space
Is left there. So when they fly to that place,
Their wings lack power and halt immediately
And on both sides they waste their energy.
They can't count on their wings and so descend
To earth and in near-empty space they send

Their souls to roam abroad through every pore
As there they lie. Well-water, furthermore,
Grows colder in the summer, since the ground
Is rarefied by heat and spreads around
Into the air what seeds it might possess.
The more the earth has lost some fieriness,
The colder grows the water that's concealed
Within the earth. Then when the earth's congealed
And pulverized by cold and coalesces,
Through that congealing into the walls it presses
What heat it has. There is a spring, they say,
Near Ammon's shrine that's cold during the day
And hot at night. This spring excessively
Men wonder at; some hold the theory
That the earth boils with the sun's fieriness
When night with terrifying gloominess
Has spread the earth. But this opinion
Is far from sensible. For, when the sun
Can't heat up water, though it blazes so,
How is it possible, when it's below
Earth's mass, that it can make the water boil,
Soaked with its heat, beneath that compressed soil,
Especially since its warmth can't adequately
Pass through a wall? How, then? Assuredly
Because the ground's more pervious right there
About the fountain than it is elsewhere.
A lot of seeds of fire are around
The water, so when night has quashed the ground
With dewy waves, the earth will frigid grow

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

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

Hanging beneath, and each learns from its brother
The stone's attracting force, which through and through
Discharges and prevails. But until you
Account for things of this sort, you must set
A deal of principles before you get
Your answer, and you must in your pursuit
Be patient as you deeply delve to root
It out. Your heedful ears and mind, therefore,
I'm anxious to elicit all the more.
In the first place, from everything we see
There must be bodies flowing constantly,
Discharged and scattered, which assail our eyes,
Exciting vision. Constant odour flies
From things, rivers are cold, the sun has heat,
The sea-waves spray as chillingly they beat
Upon the sea-walls. Through the ear a spate
Of noises ooze, which never will abate.
We have a salty taste when by the sea
We chance to take a walk; similarly
When wormwood and pure water coalesce
Before our eyes we feel a bitterness.
From all things certain qualities emanate
And then in all directions dissipate.
It's constant, since we feel it constantly,
Since it is always given us to see
All things and smell them, and to hear them, too.
How porous bodies are I'll tell to you
Once more, which in my first book I made plain.
Although it is important to attain

Knowledge of many subjects, with none more
Important than the one I'll now explore,
We must accept there's nothing that we see
But bodies mixed with void. Primarily,
In caves the rocks above with sweat ooze out,
The moisture dripping down with many a gout;
We sweat, too, and our beards grow, and the hair
Appears upon our bodies everywhere.
Food enter all our veins to boost and feed
Our frames, even the extreme parts indeed,
Like nails. Both cold and heat we feel to go
Through bronze: silver and gold we feel also
When we hold teeming cups. Voices flit through
Stone walls, where cold and odour trickle, too,
As well as fire's heat, which, too, can pierce
Through iron, for its strength is very fierce.
And when heaven's corselet girds us all around,
The power of diseases has been found,
Which comes in from without; and naturally
Storms rise from earth and sky, subsequently
Withdrawing thither, since it's very clear
That there is no non-porous texture here
On earth. Moreover, not all bodies hurled
From things have been donated in this world
The same force on the senses, nor are they
Germane to everything in the same way.
Firstly, the sun bakes earth and makes it dry
But melts the ice, compelling up on high
The snow to thaw, and wax it liquefies

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

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

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

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

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

Of sickness. These diseases bring their scourge
Either from without as down the sky they surge,
Like clouds or mist, or gather frequently
From earth when through the damp it's come to be
Putrescent, struck by an unseasonable blow
Of sun and rain. Do you not see, also,
That those who travel far from home will be
Affected by the weather's novelty?
For what a difference must we understand
Between the climate of the British land
And that of Egypt, where the world's pole's bent
Somewhat? Cannot we see how different
Is Pontus from Cadiz and from those places
Where tribes of people dwell with blackened faces?
And as we see four climates so diverse,
Four winds, four quarters of the universe,
We find folk vary in their looks and hue,
Subject to different diseases, too.
For instance there's elephantiasis,
Found by the Nile in middle-Egypt – this
Is not found elsewhere. Attica is found
To have affliction of the feet, while round
Achaea there's infection of the eyes.
Hence various different maladies arise
In various parts: it's the variety
Of airs that causes this. Accordingly,
Whenever a sky that's alien to us all
Begins to move, a dangerous air will crawl
In snail-like fashion, like a cloud or mist,

And brings chaos wherever it may list,
Compelling change; and often, when our sky
It enters, it corrupts it and thereby
It makes it like itself and therefore strange
To us. Thus when this pestilential change
Falls on the waters or upon the fields
Where corn is grown and other produce yields
The nourishment required by beasts and men
Or even hovers in the air, and when
We breathe the air mixed with it, likewise we
Must then absorb it, too. Similarly
The pestilence can give a fatal shock
To cattle and distemper to a flock
Of sluggish sheep. No matter if we take
A trip to places which are apt to make
Us sick or choose a different atmosphere
Elsewhere or if a tainted sky's brought here
By Nature or she gives us something we
Aren't used to and has the ability
To harm us! Such a cause of maladies
Occurred once in the principalities
Of Cecrops, poisoning the countryside:
It made the roads a desert as men died
In cities. Starting well within the land
Of Egypt, far across the air it spanned
The swimming plains, at length falling upon
All the inhabitants of Pandion,
Who then were visited by malady
With death assailing them extensively.

They first felt burning heat inside the head
And with that fire the eyes were flaming red.
The throat was black within and it would bleed
While ulcers clogged the passage to impede
The voice; the tongue, interpreter of the head,
Was weak with pain and also freely bled,
Heavy and rough, then, having now possessed
The throat, this dreadful plague filled up the chest,
Flooding the mind, and all life's bulwarks reeled
Indeed. The patient's breathing, too, revealed
A foul stench, like the penetrating smell
Of corpses left unburied. Then, as well,
The mind grew faint, being about to go
Across death's threshold. This oppressive woe
Rubbed shoulders with piercing anxiety
Mingled with howls and grievous threnody.
Often the patient retched through day and night,
The limbs and muscles cramped, making him quite
Past weariness. And yet one could not see
Upon the frame any torridity,
But merely warmth, which showed a vivid red
As though with ulcers, as it may be said,
It burned, as erysipelas can glide
Across the limbs. And yet men blazed inside:
A red-hot flame within the gut would burn,
And nothing light or slender could you turn
To use to help them, only wind and cold.
Some with this plague in cooling rivers rolled.

Many fell into wells, which they struck first
With gaping mouths, all drenched with parching thirst –
A water's flood seemed but a modicum.
Fatigued, they could not find one thing to numb
The pain. Below her breath, in silent fright,
Medicine muttered, since within her sight
They rolled their staring eyes repeatedly,
Sleepless and cursed by their infirmity.
Many other signs of death I'll mention here:
A mind unsettled due to grief and fear,
A gloomy brow, a look that's mad and wild,
Ears that are also troubled and beguiled
By droning, pants emitted frequently
And deep breaths uttered intermittently,
Dank sweat down from their features trickling
And thin, salt, yellow spittle issuing
With effort from the throat. Relentlessly
The hands twitched and the limbs shook; gradually
A bitter cold would creep up from the toes,
The nostrils were compressed, the tip of the nose
Grew sharp, the eyes were sunken in the head,
The temples hollow and, as of one dead,
The hard skin cold, the forehead showing strain,
The mouth agape. Very soon in death's domain
They lay. Upon the eighth day or, at most,
The ninth, those wretched folks gave up the ghost.
If one of them had happened to evade
Destructive death, yet later they were made
To undergo foul ulcers and to bear

Black discharge from the bowels – waiting there
Was waste and death, or else corrupted blood
Would issue from choked nostrils in a flood
Which pained the head, and through this ran the store
Of human strength and substance. Furthermore,
He who evaded the foul flux of blood
Yet found this plague could cascade in a flood
Into the limbs and sinews, even veer
Into the genitals. Some with a strong fear
Of death would go on living even though
They'd cut their penis off, and some would go
The rest of life without their hands and feet;
Some lost their eyes; their fear was so complete.
And there were some who lost their memory
And did not know their own identity.
Though piles of bodies lay upon the ground
Unburied, tribes of birds and beasts would bound
Away to dodge the stench or, tasting, faint
And die a speedy death due to the taint.
Yet back then no-one hardly saw a bird
And from the forests scarcely came a herd
Of gloomy beasts. Most grew weak with disease
And died. Dogs were among the first of these,
Those faithful beasts, who, scattered all about
Upon the roads, reluctantly let out
Their final breath, their lives twisted away.
And there were struggles when a vast array
Of funerals with no mourners went around
The streets. No solid remedy was found,

For what gave some the strength to breathe the air
And look up at the sky gave dark despair
To others. In predicaments like these,
The worst thing was when one found the disease
Had felled him, knowing death was looming, he
Would lie with saddened heart despondently
And give up his existence then and there.
No-one at any time or anywhere
Cease to pass on this greed plague, as though
They were but sheep and hornèd herds; and so,
Chiefly, the dead were piled up in a heap:
For anyone who made attempts to keep
Watch on the sick, although they had a dread
Of death and love of life, would soon be dead,
Afflicted by a fatal carelessness,
Themselves deserted, plagued by helplessness.
But those who stayed at hand would perish there
From the disease and labour that they'd bear
Through duty and the voice of those who'd plead
As wearily they watched, mingled indeed
With dying wails. It was this kind of death
That noble people at their final breath
Would meet. Now by this time the shepherds all,
The drovers, ploughmen, to, began to fall.
In the back-corners of their huts they'd lie,
Assailed by poverty and doomed to die.
One sometimes saw a total family
Lifeless, the mother, father, progeny.
The countryside, though, had no less despair

Than Rome whither there came from everywhere
A mob of sickly farmers – they would press
In buildings and outside, where death's distress
Pied up the corpses. Many a sick man went
Out to the highways, by his great thirst sent,
And by the fountains with Silenus' head
They now, choked with their hankering, lay dead.
And all along those highways one might see
Many a half-dead body raggedly
Abused with negligence, near buried quite
With vile and obscene filth – a dreadful sight!
Wrapped up in rags and well-nigh putrefied,
With nought but skin upon their bones, they died.
The holy temples of the deities
Had Death becrammed with all its carcasses,
Each altar filled with corpses everywhere,
The shrine of which the sacristans took care
And filled with guests. There was no admiration
For worship now, for all the tribulation
Suppressed it. Burial rites, which evermore
Had been observed for many years before,
Was banished. Everyone was filled with dread
And, as he may, would bury his own dead.
For sudden urgency and poverty
Caused awful acts, as people piercingly
Shrieked out as on a stranger's pyre they lay
Their kin: the torch once placed beneath it, they
Indulged in bloody brawls rather than leave
Their loved one, and then they would weep and grieve

As they went home. A multiplicity

Would take themselves to bed in misery.

And there was nobody whom one would know

Untouched by death and malady and woe.