

## GEORGICS

### I

What makes the cornfields happy, when to plough  
The earth and fasten vines to elm-trees, how  
To tend oxen and cows, what faculties  
Are needed to attend the thrifty bees –  
Such are the themes I now begin to sing.  
You universal bright lights travelling  
Across the skies through all the passing years,  
Ceres replaced our acorns with fat ears  
Of wheat, while Bacchus was a pioneer –  
To mix with Achelous' streams down here                    10  
He brought us wine. Fauns, farmers' deities,  
Dance with the dryads! For I sing of these  
Your gifts. I sing you, Neptune, for whom Earth,  
When you shook your great trident, first gave birth  
To whinnying steeds, and, Aristaeus, you,  
The planter of the grove, dispatched all through  
The thickets of rich Cea fifteen score  
Of snowy cattle. Pan, in your love for  
Your Maenalus, you left your native seat,  
Your forest and your lawns. Hear me entreat!                    20  
Help me, o lord! Help me, Minerva, too,  
Inventor of the olive! Help me, you  
Discoverer of the plough, Neoptolemus,  
Who then were but a boy! And Silvanus,

Bearing the young uprooted cypress-tree –  
 I call on each and every deity,  
 Who makes the fields your care, both you who nurse  
 The unsown produce and you who disperse  
 You rain upon it all, and you who we  
 Don't know yet where in Heaven finally                      30  
 Will reign, whether it could be your intent,  
 Great Caesar, watching from the firmament,  
 To guard our cities and thus take in hand  
 The earth and put her under your command,  
 Blessed by the mighty world that you might be  
 The bringer of her fruits with sovereignty  
 From year to year, tying around your brow  
 Your mother's myrtle. And let Thule bow  
 Before you as the god of Ocean's vast  
 Expanse, sole fear of sailors, till at last                      40  
 You're Tethys' son-in-law, or you'll elate  
 With fresh beams months which have a lagging gait.  
 Between the Cancer's dread claws and the maid  
 Erigone a space is now displayed.  
 Red Scorpio's drawn his arms in and see there!  
 You've got a mead of Heaven, and to spare!  
 For Tartarus would never call you king,  
 Nor may you have such lustful hankering,  
 However Greece's partiality  
 For his abode and Queen Proserpine                      50  
 Not heeding her own mother's earnest prayer  
 To go back thither. Smile on me and swear  
 I'll have a prosperous voyage! Please hear me

And promise me that you'll have sympathy  
For all those wretched rustics and will pay  
Attention to them when to you they pray!  
In early springtime, when the icy drops  
Of hoary snow melt on the mountain-tops  
And Zephyr's breath unbinds the crumbling blocks  
Of earth, press deep your plough behind the ox, 60  
And make your ploughshare shine! The farmer's prayer  
Is answered by the land that's been laid bare  
Twice to the sun, twice to the frost. That land  
Has borne a crop that made the barns expand  
And burst. And yet before the share should split  
A surface that is yet unknown, it's fit  
To learn of winds and the diversified  
Moods of the sky, the fields where we abide  
And all their traits, and what each region yields  
And what it spurns. Here blithelier the fields 70  
Bear corn, here grapes increase, here's greenery  
With earth and trees and grass unbidden. See  
Tmolus has sent us a saffron bouquet  
And India ivory; from far away  
Saba has sent us incense, the Black Sea  
Provides us with rank beaver-oil, while we  
Have iron from the naked Chalybes  
And splendid mares from the localities  
Of Elis. That's the law eternally  
Imposed on every regionality 80  
By Nature ever since Deucalion  
In that primeval dawn cast stones upon

The earth, wherefrom a flinty race of men  
 Was cultivated. Start your labour, then!  
 If you should find the soil is fruitful, set  
 Your sturdy bulls before the plough and let  
 Them turn it early in the year. You must  
 Lay bare the clods till they are baked to dust  
 In summer's sun, but if the earth's not been  
 Fertile, it is enough to lift it in 90  
 More shallow furrows as you toil below  
 Arcturus: you must do this, firstly, so  
 That weeds don't harm the crops and, secondly,  
 The sand retains the scant liquidity.  
 In every other year allow to lie  
 Untouched your fields, or, when you see the sky  
 Showing new stars, then sow the golden wheat  
 Where once you cleared the crop of pulse, complete  
 With quivering pod, the slender vetch-crop and  
 The sour lupin, whose brittle stalks stand 100  
 Upright and fill the forest with their sound.  
 The flax and oats and poppies parch the ground.  
 But labour always prospers with rotation,  
 So do not be ashamed of saturation –  
 Pour rich dung on the soil and spread around  
 A shower of ashes on the weary ground!  
 Rotation brings the fields some needed rest,  
 And earth with produce is not left unblessed.  
 Often the sterile fields will benefit  
 From fire, and so make sure the stalks are lit. 110  
 Thereby fat food and veiled stability

The earth derives, or else the fire maybe  
Will break each blemish out and sweat away  
Each useless humour or the heat display  
New hidden pores and passages, wherefore  
The blades are nourished, or they harden more  
And help to bind the gaping veins in case  
Fine showers and the mighty sun's bright face  
Or cruel Boreas's searching blow  
Should cause those veins to parch. For well I know 120  
That one must rake the clods and over these  
Drag osier hurdles, Glittering Ceres  
Far on Olympus does not look in vain  
On those who do or him who ploughs the plain  
And lifts its ridges, turning then his share  
Crosswise in order that the earth might bear  
His constant strokes beneath his mastery.  
Wet summers and fine winters both should be  
Your wish, you farmers. Winter's dust will buoy  
The crops exceedingly and give great joy 130  
To all the fields. No suchlike cultivation  
Has ever prompted so much admiration  
For Mysia and Gargarus. Where's the need  
To speak of him who, having launched his seed,  
Rakes smooth the dry and dusty hillocks, then  
Pours water on the tender corn, and when  
The parched field's dying, from the hill-bed's top  
Luring the water down upon the crop,  
Awakening a strident murmuring  
Among the polished stones, the bubbling 140

Shaking the fields? Again, what is the need  
To speak of him who takes great care to feed  
Down his luxuriant crop in case the stalk  
Bends down with over-heavy ears and balk  
His work? Or him who drains from the marsh-land  
The mud that's gathered through the soaking sand,  
Particularly at a changeable time  
Of year when rivers overflow with slime,  
The dykes sweating with steam. Despite the toil  
Of man and beast who often turn the soil,                    150  
The Strymon-haunting cranes, the greedy geese,  
The endive's fibres and the shade don't cease  
To harm. There is no easy strategy  
That Jove has given us for husbandry.  
He first gave us the skill to animate  
The clods and gradually to stimulate  
Men's minds. For there had been no taming hand  
Before, no boundary-line marking one's land  
(Even this was impious), for everything  
Was heaped together, and from earth would spring 160  
But common stock. He gave a poisonous bite  
To serpents and to wolves he gave the right  
To prowl, the seas to toss, and he forbade  
The leaves to keep the honey that they'd had,  
Banned fire and curbed wine that ran all through  
The streams that various skills might then ensue  
By thoughtful practice, with the furrow's aid  
Initiated growth in the corn-blade  
And from the veins that held the flint took care

To douse the fire. The rivers were aware  
Of floating alder-boats; an appellation  
The sailors gave to every constellation –  
The Pleiades, the Hyades, the Bears  
Of Lycaon – men learned to catch in snares  
The game they hunted for and to confound  
With birdlime and the massive glades surround  
With hounds. One checked the stream's profundity  
With nets, another trailed across the sea  
His dripping toils; then came the rigid might  
Of iron and the saw-blade's shrieking bite, 180  
With which the men of old split logs, and then  
A wealth of arts arose among all men.  
Toil conquered everything remorselessly  
And want accompanied austerity.  
First Ceres gave to men the wherewithal  
To turn the sod. When groves began to fall  
In disrepair, refusing now to bear  
Acorns and strawberries, man's wonted fare  
Dodona gave no more. An evil blight  
Ate up the corn-stalks, raising sorrow's height, 190  
And in the idle fields the thistle reared  
Its spines, so that the crops soon disappeared;  
A shaggy mass of burrs and caltrops grew  
Instead and, lying in the corn-fields, too,  
Unfruitful darnel and wild oats held sway.  
So if you did not scare the birds away  
With shouting, rake the weeds with ceaseless care,  
Pruning the dark field's shade, and send a prayer

For showers, it will be in vain you see  
Your neighbour's harvest, shaking an oak-tree     200

For sustenance. Now I'll enumerate  
The tools a rustic is to operate,  
Without which nothing can be reared or sown,  
That one may have a harvest of one's own –  
The share, the lumbering cart, the threshing-sled,  
The drag, the harrow heavier than lead,  
And, furthermore, the low-cost wicker-ware  
Of King Celeus, the hurdles that can bear  
Arbut and Bacchus' fan. All these

Store safely if the country's dignities                     210

You wait for, while within the woods you tame  
And bend the elm with mighty force to frame  
A stock and shape the plough, and into it  
A pole eight feet in length you then must fit,  
Two earth-boards and a share with double back,  
And for the yoke a lime-tree you must hack;  
And for the handle you must find a tall  
Beech-tree so that you may pivot it all  
Right at its lowest point, and then be sure

That smoke out of the hearth will then mature     220

The wood. Past principles I can reveal  
As long as such slight cares don't make you feel  
Weary: the threshing-floor especially  
Has to be levelled smooth; additionally  
It must be brushed by hand and then with clay  
Made firm lest weeds spring up there or, one day,



It splits, by dust defeated, or maybe  
A thousand plagues infest it. Frequently  
A mouse will live there, planting underground  
Her granary, or purblind moles are found                      230  
To bed therein or toads or many a beast  
Awful to see or weevils keep their feast  
Of corn there, and the ant, who's fearfully  
Aware of coming age and penury.  
Note, too, the blooming walnut bending low  
Its odorous branches – if the fruit should grow,  
More grain will follow with the heated aid  
Of winnowing, but if there is a shade  
Of countless leaves, the threshing-floor in vain  
Will damage the rich stalks which yet contain                      240  
But chaff. Many a sower have I known  
To steep his seeds, while they were being sown,  
With nitrate and the lees of olive-oil  
To swell the fruit and then make haste to boil  
In meagre fires. Yet I've also seen  
These seeds, although with patient toil they've been  
Extracted, still decay unless someone  
Picked out the largest. Thus, by Fate undone,  
All things regress, as one who strains to row  
His skiff upstream - if he should weaken, lo!                      250  
He's swept back by the current. Keep an eye  
Upon Arcturus and be guided by  
The seasons of the Kids and of the Snake,  
No less than those who through the billows make  
A journey on the sea and, homeward, try

To sail across the Black Sea and defy  
Abydos' jaws. When Libra makes the night  
And daytime equal, matching shade with light,  
Then with your oxen, sow your barley, men,  
Until the winter's rains come round again, 260

The flax, too, and the poppy. Work your plough,  
While yet the earth is dry and will allow  
And clouds are high. Sow your beans in the spring:  
Lucern's accepted by the crumbling  
Furrows, and millet, too – that's when the year  
Begins as we perceive the Bull appear,  
All white with gilded horns. At his advent  
The Dog-Star disappears. If your intent  
Is sowing wheat or spelt, the soil must be  
Attacked, with corn-ears sown exclusively. 270

Atlas's daughters at the break of day  
Must hide and Crete's hot crown must flee away  
Before you plant the seeds lest you confound  
Your year's hopes and cheat the unwilling ground.  
Many have started work before the star  
Of Maia has set in the sky – these are  
Deceived with empty ears, but if you're keen  
On vetch or on the common kidney-bean  
And do not scorn the lentils from the land  
Of Egypt, you're not likely to withstand 280

Boötes sending adverse signs. Then start  
Your sowing well into the very heart  
Of winter's frosts. And so the sun, his way  
Divided in fixed segments, will hold sway

Through the five constellations. In the sky  
There are five zones, in one of which an eye  
Of flashing brightness is seen to abide;  
The furthest two zones lie on either side,  
Stiff with blue ice and black with storms; between  
These two there are two others which have been 290  
Bestowed by God to sick humanity:  
A path is cleft between them where we see  
Their sloping order; as the world ascends  
To Scythia's mountains, likewise it descends  
To Libya, with one pole towering high,  
The other down below and frowned on by  
Hades. The sinuous Snake there may be found  
And the two Bears that, river-like, glide round  
Them all – beneath the ocean's brim they fear  
To dip, for in those depths below, we hear, 300  
There reigns the endless hush of blackest night  
That knows no season, her pall smothered tight  
About her fold by fold, or at the end  
Of our own day, Dawn leaves our realm to send  
Them back their day, and when the rising sun,  
With panting horses, breathes on everyone,  
Vesper's alight. Thus we can prophecy  
The seasons underneath a doubtful sky.  
Therefore, accordingly we can foretell  
The time for harvest and seed-time as well, 300  
And when to venture on the treacherous sea  
With oars or ships or fell the tall pine-tree.  
Not idly do we watch the stars, how they

Both rise and set; the year, as well, we pay  
Attention to, four seasons which concord  
With but one law, although they all afford  
Variety. If farmers shut the door  
Against the freezing rain, they have much more  
Time to prepare for sun. A rigid blade  
To fix upon the blunted share is made; 320  
Tree-trunks are shaped for troughs; the herd receives  
Its brands; and farmers number their corn-sheaves;  
Both stakes and prongs are sharpened; and farm-hands  
Ready for bending boughs the willow-bands.  
Now parch your corn, now bruise it with the stone.  
But it is not on secular days alone  
That some tasks may be plied; there is no ban  
From switching water's course; one always can  
Fence in one's fields or make traps to ensnare  
The birds or burn the briars anywhere 330  
Or wash one's flock. Often the farmer rides  
To town upon his sluggish mule whose sides  
Bear olive-oil and cheap fruit, bringing back  
A dented millstone and a heap of black  
Pitch. Know, too, that the moon herself has made  
Some various days fitting for toil: evade  
The fifth, for then the Furies and Orcus  
Were born and then the earth bore Iapetus,  
Coeus, Typhoeus, beast of savagery,  
And the brothers who attempted wickedly 340  
To raze the Heavens – three times, on and on,  
They tried to pile Ossa on Pelion,

Olympus then on Ossa. But Jove split  
The pile apart each time, destroying it.  
The seventeenth is lucky both to set  
The vine in earth and tame the steer and get  
The thrums fixed to the warp. Now, the ninth day,  
Though bad for thieves, abets the runaway.  
So many tasks are in the chilly night  
Lighter, or when the sun is young and bright                    350  
And Dawn arrives. It's best to reap the stalks  
And arid fields by night – night never balks  
Its moisture. In the winter firelight  
A man is sitting well into the night,  
Honing his torches, being pacified  
With songs his wife sings, sitting at his side.  
Or through the warp the comb is rattling,  
Or else the sweet grape-juice is bubbling  
Within the cauldron, and the corn meanwhile  
Is mown in sunshine, and in a large pile                    360  
The bruised ears lie upon the floor. If you  
Would plough, strip, and if you would sow, strip, too.  
In winter-time the farmers take delight  
In what they've gleaned and think it only right  
To yield to festal cheer, for they're set free,  
As laden ships, abandoning the sea,  
Are crowned with flowers by the happy crew.  
Nevertheless, it's an occasion, too,  
To strip the oaks of acorns, from the bay  
Berries, olives and myrtles, and to lay                    370  
Snares for the crane, nets for the stag, also

To hunt the long-eared hares and pierce the doe  
With slings, while snow lies deep and ice we see  
Drifting in streams. Is there necessity  
To tell of autumn's storms and stars or when  
The time is critical for husbandmen  
To watch for shorter days and while those days  
Become more changeable and springtime sprays  
Us with her showers or upon the plain  
The harvest bristles or the milky grain 380  
Is swelling with green stalks? When farmers go  
To reap their yellow fields and bring down low  
The brittle barley-stems I've often spied  
The legions of the winds in war collide  
And rip the heavy corn up from the ground  
The toss it up and scatter it all around:  
So might the dark and eddying winter's flaw  
Whirl everywhere the stalks and flying straw.  
Torrential rain, looming across the sky,  
Will often fall; a tempest way up high 390  
The clouds collect and cast from Heaven's height  
And flood the smiling crops and cause a blight  
Upon the oxen's endless drudgery.  
The dikes fill fast, river-beds thunderously  
Increase, the ocean boils, and at midnight  
Our father Jupiter casts bolts of light,  
The vast earth trembles, and all creatures flee  
And terror conquers all men's hearts, while he  
Speeds over Athos and the Ceraunian heights  
And Rhodope with shafts of blazing lights. 400

The South Winds and the rain increase once more;  
The woods ring loudly with a mighty roar,  
And the shores reciprocate. In fear  
Of this, take note of each month of the year  
And Heaven's signs, for you must be aware  
Of whither Saturn disappears and where  
Cyllene's orb meanders. Principally  
Worship the gods, remitting annually  
Her dues to Ceres on the happy green  
With sacrifice where there can now be seen       400  
The end of winter and the smile of spring.  
The lambs are fat and wines are burgeoning  
Up to their mellowest; then, too, we sleep  
Untroubled and the darkling shadows creep  
Across the mountains. Homage must be done  
To Ceres by the young folk, every one;  
And for her pleasure see that you combine  
The honeycombs with milk and seasoned wine.  
Around the corn before you sacrifice  
The victim let the animal go thrice       420  
For luck and let the joyful company  
Of singers tend to it! Let Ceres be  
Their fellow-lodger! And let no man set  
His sickle to the ears, for he has yet,  
With oak about his brows, to chant the lay  
And foot the rugged dance! So that we may  
By certain tokens be able to heed  
Heat, rain and chilly winds Jove has decreed  
What signs the moon for each month will display –

What tells us when the South Winds will allay      430  
Their blows, what things the cattleman might see  
To make him think about security  
And keep his cattle safe within their stalls.  
As soon as winds arise, the ocean brawls  
And swells, there is a dry and crackling sound  
Upon the heights, far off the shores resound,  
And many a murmur in the glades we hear,  
Ships founder and the swift sea-birds in fear  
Fly back from ocean, shrieking on the strand,  
The seaboard coots settling upon the land,      440  
The heron leaves the marshland, flying high.  
Often when winds are threatening in the sky  
Stars glide headlong, and through the murky night  
Long trails of fire are noted, glistening white,  
And chaff and fallen leaves fly all around  
And feathers on the water may be found  
Floating at play. But when the lightning  
Is heard up in the north and thundering  
We hear around the winds of east and west,  
The entire countryside is now oppressed      450  
With flooding, and all sails are furled at sea.  
Rain never takes a man unwittingly,  
For cranes that soar above us, when it hails,  
Avoid it as they flee into the vales,  
The heifer snuffs the air with nostrils wide,  
The swallows, as around the pools they glide,  
Twitter, and frogs their ancient threnody  
Croak in their muddy home, while frequently



The ant from deep within her nest will bring  
Her eggs, her narrow path manoeuvring; 460  
The huge rainbow sucks moisture, and a crowd  
Of rooks comes from the pasture with a loud  
Jostling of its wings, then you might spy  
A host of ocean-fowl and those that pry  
About the Asian fields and flit around  
Cayster's fresher-pools – they can be found  
Splashing about in eager rivalry,  
Ducking their heads or rushing joyfully  
Into the billows, while the no-good crow  
Will loudly croak for rain and come and go 470  
Upon the dry sand, mateless and alone.  
Even to maids the storm-signs are well-known  
As they bend to their weaving tasks each night,  
For in the blazing potsherd they catch sight  
Of muddy clots of oil upon the lamp  
And you may forecast, too, after the damp  
Of rain-showers, warmer weather and sunshine,  
For this is learned by many a certain sign –  
The stars take on a far from dusky phase,  
The moon not covered by her brother's rays. 480  
As she ascends; this fleecy clouds don't glide  
Across the sky, and halcyons, which provide  
Delight to Thetis, do not anymore,  
To catch the warm sun on the sandy shore,  
Spread out their wings, and pigs don't toss about  
Loose bales of hay, the mists now seeking out  
The valleys move and settle on the plain;

The owl gives out its twilight calls in vain  
On some high hill. Nisus is very clear,  
Whose purple lock caused Scylla to pay dear      490  
For her misdeed. Wherever through the air  
She flies, Nisus, her nemesis, is there  
Behind her. Rooks call out repeatedly  
Out of their narrowed throats, and frequently  
Within their nests above us, gladdened by  
A hidden joy beyond its wont, on high  
Bustle among the leaves. Then when the rain-  
Showers are gone, it's sweet to seek again  
One's nest; not that I think that they possess  
Divine wit or a greater consciousness      500  
Of Fate but rather when the falling rain  
From fickle skies and storms change once again,  
Wet with the south winds, the god of the air  
Makes rare what's dense and densifies what's rare.  
Their spirits' fleeting phases change as well  
And in their breasts other emotions dwell.  
Hence comes the avian chorus in the lea,  
The cattle's joy, the rooks' hoarse victory.  
Pay close attention to the suns and moon  
In order and you'll find out very soon      510  
That they are truthful. By the cloudless night  
You won't be caught. As soon as the moon's light  
Waxes, if in her horns we should espy  
A dusky mist, then heavy rains are nigh  
For mariners and those who farm their land,  
But if a virgin blushing should expand

Across her face, a wind will then arise,  
For wind turns Phoebe gold in all men's eyes.  
But if at her fourth rising (for indeed  
That is the surest counsel), she will speed 520  
Through Heaven with sharp horns and every day  
From then until the month's extreme shall stay  
Rainless and windless, while, safe and secure  
Upon the shore, the mariners are sure  
To pay their thankful vows to Panope,  
Glaucus and Melicertes, progeny  
Of Ino. When it rises and then goes  
Beneath the ocean's waves, the sun, too, shows  
Us signs which travel with the sun, and they  
Are the most certain, both those which display 530  
The dawn and rising stars. When the sun stains  
His orb with spots and at his core remains  
Hidden by clouds, expect some falling rain!  
For then the south winds rise and bring a bane  
To trees and crops and cattle. At cock-crow  
Through murky clouds he bursts his rays, and so  
They're scattered. When Aurora pokes her head  
Above and quits Tithonus' saffron bed,  
The grape-vine proves a sorry sanctuary  
For ripening grapes, and hail torrentially 540  
Rattles upon the roof. When he descends  
From high Olympus, we see various blends  
Of colour on his features. A dark blue  
Announces rain-storms while a fiery hue  
Predicts east winds, and if spots coalesce

With ruddy fire, you'll see a feverishness  
In Heaven – winds and storm-clouds all together.  
Let me not go to sea in such foul weather!  
But if day's brought and ended by the sun  
Who's shining brightly, not for anyone                      550  
Are storms a fear, and you'll see straightaway  
Beneath a clear north wind the forests sway.  
What the late evening brings us, whence the breeze  
Bears tranquil clouds, what are the strategies  
The South Wind has – all these the sun supplies.  
Who dares say otherwise? He warns of guile  
And hidden strife. He showed Rome sympathy  
At Caesar's death – in dark obscurity  
He veiled his shining head, and there was fright  
That in that impious age eternal night                      560  
Would come. For then the earth and level sea,  
Troublesome canines and the company  
Of fateful birds gave omens. Etna'd drown  
The meadows frequently as she poured down  
The streams of lava from her shattered top,  
And gout of flame and rock flew, neck and crop!  
They heard the weapons' clash in Germany  
Across the skies; the Alps erratically  
Trembled. In silent groves a piercing shout  
Was heard with pale ghosts wandering about                      570  
Throughout the night, and beasts – how ominous  
Was this! – articulated words, like us,  
And streams stood still, earth gaped, and ivory  
For sorrow wept within its sanctuary

And bronzes sweated; Eridanus sent  
Cattle within their stalls, all swept away.  
The dark and threatening fibres would display  
Themselves in black guts. Fountains trickling  
Blood were observed; a night-long echoing 580  
Of howling wolves could be perceived all through  
The high-built cities. From a clear sky, too,  
Fell thunderbolts and fiery comets blazed.  
Therefore a second time Philippi gazed  
On civil war. The high gods couldn't dream  
That Haemus and Emathia would stream  
With Roman blood. Indeed there'll come the day  
When, with his curved plough heaving up the clay,  
Some farmer will light on a rusty lance  
Or with his heavy harrow strike by chance 590  
Some empty helmets as he sees, aghast,  
Large bones. My gods and hero of the past,  
Romulus, and you who keep the Palatine  
And Tiber safe, Vesta, do not decline  
To this new champion your salutation,  
Who shall repair our fallen generation.  
We've paid enough for Trojan perjury  
Ans Heaven has more than sufficiently  
Denied you to us, Caesar: they complain  
Your needs for earthly triumphs still remain 600  
Unanswered. Right and wrong are here reversed:  
There are so many evil wars disbursed  
Around the world and strife is everywhere;  
There is no fit esteem for the ploughshare,

And while the husbandmen are far away,  
Their fields are left to languish in decay;  
Hooks become swords, the East and Germany  
Beget new conflict, and hostility  
Infects our neighbours, and the leaves that bound  
Them all have now been snapped; the godless sound  
Of war is raging madly through the world,  
Just as when four-horsed chariots are hurled  
Across the course – the chariot never heeds  
The curb as the driver lashes on his steeds.

## II

So much for fields and stars. Now will I sing,  
Bacchus, of you and of the blossoming  
Of young plants and the olive, laggardly  
In growing. With great haste, then, come to me,  
You who control the wine-press! All things here  
Are teeming with your gifts which bring us cheer.  
Laden with viny autumn blooms the field  
And brimming vats foam with the vintage yield;  
Come, stain your bared limbs in new must with me!  
For generating trees Nature's decree  
Is manifold – some of their own force grow  
Across the plains and rivers high and low,  
As osiers, brooms, poplars and willow-trees  
That glimmer grey in pallid companies;  
Some drop their seeds by chance, as chestnuts do,  
And in Jove's woods the broad-leaved oak-tree, too,

The mightiest of all, considered by  
The ancient Greeks able to prophesy.  
The cherries and the elms sprout from their base  
A wealth of shoots that take up all the space        20  
In forests, while a pygmy plant, below  
His mother's mighty shade, is sure to grow  
Into the laurel-tree of Parnassus.  
Such ways did Nature first impart to us.  
Hence shrubs and sacred groves and forest-trees  
Spring into verdure. Other means than these  
Have been acquired through use: thus variously  
One cuts the shoots from the soft mother-tree  
And plants them in the trench, another's found  
To bury the bare stumps beneath the ground        30  
As stakes and spikes; some trees await the set  
And slips, alive within the soil; and yet  
Some need no root – the pruner won't delay  
To move the topmost shoot up through the clay  
And give it birth. This is amazing, too –  
When olive-trunks are cut, the root thrusts through  
The dry wood. Often branches of one kind  
Change to another's, though we always find  
No harm in this; a pear will alter, too,  
That it may carry grafted apples; you        40  
May see a stony cherry in a tree  
Of plums. Come, farmers, and attend to me  
And learn the different kinds of cultivation  
And tame the wild fruits lest there be stagnation  
Upon the earth! Let's make all Ismarus

One forest of the wine-god, populous  
With wine! Let huge Tabernus be arrayed  
With olives! In my labour be my aid,  
Chief portion of my fame, I call on you,  
Glorious Maecenas – you must aid me, too. 50

On this wide ocean spread your sails with me!  
But it is not that my poor poetry  
Could comprehend the whole, even if indeed  
With countless tongues and iron voice. I plead  
Your presence. Skirt the nearest coast – the shore  
Is in our grasp. Therefore I will no more  
Detain you with feigned song and rambling ways  
And long preludes. Trees that into the rays  
Of light lift up themselves turn out to be  
Unfruitful but full of vitality 60

And pleasing, thanks to the abilities  
Of Nature lurking there. Yet even these,  
Should one try to engraft them or, maybe,  
Transplant them in deep trenches, presently  
Will doff their woodland nature and, by way  
Of careful cultivation, won't delay  
To heed you, and the barren shaft, likewise,  
That from the deepest stock-root will arise,  
If in the fields there is an open space.  
The mother now displays a darkened face 70  
In leaves and boughs and all her progeny  
Degenerate and lose their piquancy,  
The sorry clusters of the grapes a prey  
For birds. Much labour must be spent each day,



Especially on the trenches – it's ignored  
At great cost. Reared by boles, olives afford  
The best results, as vines respond the best  
From layers, and the Paphian myrtles rest  
Content with solid wood. From suckers spring  
Hazels and ash, the tree that wraps a ring                      80  
Of shade about the brows of Hercules  
And Jove's acorns; and towering palm-trees  
Spring, too, those trees designed to travel through  
The seas. Arbutus with the walnut, too,  
Is grafted; so the barren planes before  
Bore sturdy apples, and the beech, what's more,  
The chestnut-flowers, and with the bloom of pear  
The mountain-ash turned snowy-white, and there  
Were pigs munching on acorns greedily  
Beneath the elms. There's no one strategy                      90  
For grafting or for budding eyes; for where  
The buds push forth amidst the bark and tear  
The membranes, even on the knot we see  
A narrow rift whence from some alien tree  
They pen a seed, exhorting it to grow  
Within the moist rind. But you need to know  
That otherwise the knotless trunks are cleft  
And deep into the solid grain is left  
A wedged path. Fruitful strips inside the rind  
Are set, and then in no time you will find                      100  
Luxuriant branches up to Heaven shoot  
With their strange foliage and alien fruit.  
Elms, willows, lotus and the cypress-trees

Of Ida comprise several categories;  
 For olives, orcades and radii  
 And pausians are all quite differently  
 Fashioned. Others are homogeneous  
 As well – the forests of Alcinous  
 And apples, and the Crustumian pear  
 Possesses cuttings that do not compare                      110  
 With Syrian, nor yet the ponderous  
*Volema*. Our trees do not yield for us  
 The same fruits as are in Lesbos, for there  
 Are Mareotids and vines from Phasia, where  
 The rich soil's apter for the latter one,  
 The light the former, and the Psithian  
 Will serve the raisin-wine delightfully,  
 And light Lagean which eventually  
 Will trip your feet and tie your tongue, as well  
 As purples and grape-vines. How can I tell                      120  
 Your assets, Rhaetic? But you must not spar  
 With the Falernian bins. There also are  
 The Aminaeon, a full-bodied wine  
 That's venerated by the Tmolian vine  
 And regal Phanaeus and, lesser in fame,  
 Argitis, although nobody can name  
 An equal to it for longevity  
 Or output. Rhodian, you will not find me  
 Omitting you, because the gods on high  
 All welcome you and you are greeted by                      130  
 The second course with praise. Bumastus, too,  
 With your plump clusters, I'll not leave out you!

How many kinds, how many names exist  
Nobody knows nor does it help to list  
Them all – you'd need to know how many grains  
Of sand are blown upon Libya's plains,  
Or, when Eurus attacks ships furiously,  
How many waves roll shorewards from the sea.  
There are, though, different soils upon the earth –  
Willows by streams or rivers have their birth,       140  
Alders by fens, the mountain-ashes stand  
On rocky heights, while myrtles throng the strand  
And thrive, while, lastly, Bacchus loves the bare  
Hillside, and yews adore the chilly air  
Of the north wind. Farmers from many a nation  
Control the crops they grow through cultivation,  
Such as the Arabs and the Scythian race.  
There is a difference from place to place  
In trees. India alone bears ebony,  
Saba alone has incense. Why hear me               150  
Tell of the balsams that from perfumed wood  
Go trickling down? And, furthermore, why should  
I tell you of the fruits of evergreen  
Acanthus? That Ethiopian trees are seen  
Producing cotton? How in China they  
Comb silk from leaves? Or how, in faraway  
India, groves exist beside the sea,  
Where not one arrow flies successfully  
Above the trees, although they're never slow  
To handle both the quiver and the bow?  
Media yields her bitter juice and slow-

Lingering citron taste, and Ganges, so  
Beauteous, and Hermus, with its treasury  
Of gold, but they're no match for Italy,  
Nor India is nor Bactria nor the land  
Of Panchaia, its incense-burning sand  
Cutting a spacious swath. For never here  
Were fire-snorting bulls seen to appear  
To sow the dragon's teeth and crop a horde  
Of warriors equipped with lance and sword; 170  
No, heavy harvests and the juice created  
By Massic Bacchus are disseminated  
With fruitful flocks and olives. The war-horse  
Arose to step with pride upon its course  
Across the plain. Hence white flocks and the bull,  
The greatest of all victims, which has full  
Often led off the victory parade  
As to the temples of the gods they made  
Their way with those born in the Roman nation,  
Cleansed in Clitumnus for purification. 180  
Perpetual spring blooms in our land, and here  
Summers in months not even hers appear.  
The flocks teem twice, and twice, as well, the tree  
Yields fruit. But vicious tigers we don't see,  
Nor lions; aconite will not betray  
Their pickers; serpents with an endless sway  
Of coils are never seen in Italy;  
So many cities, full of dignity,  
Hard-working, town by town by mortal hand  
Reared up on rugged precipices, and 190

Rivers beneath old walls! Or should I sing  
About the sea that comes a-tumbling  
Upon both shores? Or the broad lakes, Larius,  
The greatest of the lakes, and Benacus,  
Which billows furiously just like the sea?  
Or should I sing about her ports, maybe,  
The barrier across the Lucrine lake,  
The way the ocean chafes and tends to make  
A bellowing sound, and where the echoing  
Made by the Julian waves is thundering, 200  
And through Avernus' straits the Tuscan tide  
Cascades. As well, our country's veins provide  
Rivers of silver, copper ore and gold  
Aplenty – it's a land that bred a bold  
And valiant race of young men – the Marsi  
And the Sabelli, schooled in industry,  
Ligurians and Volscians, who bear  
The javelin, the Decii too; then there  
Are the Camilli and the Marii,  
A mighty race of men, the Scipii, 210  
Stubborn in war, and Caesar, who away  
In farthest India was quick to stay  
The docile Indians from reaching Rome.  
The gods save you as well, Lord Saturn's home,  
Great mother who gives us her progeny  
Of fruits and men of warlike bravery!  
This work of ancient art I carry out  
For you and let the sacred fountains spout  
And sing the song of Ascrea through the land.

And now's the time for you to understand 220

The various soils, the strength they have, their hue,

Their natural bent for yielding increase, too.

First, harsh lands and rough hill-sides, where you may

See thorny fields of gravel and sparse clay,

Love groves of long-lived olives held do dear

By Pallas. For the oleaster's near

Those places, growing unrestrainedly,

The ground protecting all its progeny

Of woodland berries. But delighting us

Are fertile soil, moistly mellifluous, 230

And plains that teem with grass, as frequently

We see in valleys (streams torrentially

Flow in it from the high cliffs, carrying

Rich mud), up to the south and nourishing

The fern that hates the plough – in just one day

It will provide you with a vast array

Of wine, as fruitful as the juice that we

In golden bowls pour to the heavenly

Gods, when the sleek Etruscan pipes away

And on the altar's round-shaped dish we lay 240

The reeking entrails. If it's your delight

To rear cows, steers or lambs, or goats, a blight

To tender plants, seek out Tarentum – she

Is lush in glades and meadows, or, maybe,

A plain whose weedy waters feed the swan

(A plain that Mantua once looked upon

But lost): her flocks won't lack a limpid spring

Or grass, and ever will night's cold dew bring

The pasture back they cropped the previous day.  
The ploughshare gives her meadows crumbling clay, 250  
Both dark and rich – and when we plough the land  
We aim for this as well; its crops are grand -  
There is no field from which you'll ever see  
More wagons dragged by oxen wearily,  
Heading for home, or earth from which, in spleen,  
A farmer has destroyed the groves, long-seen  
Untouched but now quite gone, and snatched away  
The wonted haunt of birds, who now must stray  
Among the clouds. Beneath the ploughshare's blow,  
However, the rude plain begins to glow. 260  
The starved hill-country's gravel narrowly  
Serves bees with cassia and rosemary;  
The chalk and lumpy tufa, gnawed through by  
The dusky water-worms, clearly deny  
That there's no other soil so well-supplied  
With food for serpents or places to hide.  
What exhales mist and flitting smoke will swill  
The moisture and then cast it out at will,  
Which, ever in its own green verdure dressed,  
Won't rust the metal – your elms will be blessed 270  
With happy vines and olives; you will find  
Through ploughing of your soil that it is kind  
To cattle, patient of the curved ploughshare -  
Such is the soil that you may find elsewhere -  
Rich Capua, Vesuvius's shore  
That skirts that mountain's ridge and, furthermore,  
Clanius' flood, its bane and desolation.

Learn now each region's identification:

You ask about each one's consistency?

If you're producing corn, the soil must be 280

Firmer, although for wine none can be found

Too loose. With careful eye first choose your ground,

Then deep down in the earth bid that a pit

Be sunk, then smooth the surface over it.

If it's deficient, then the land is light,

For cattle and the kindly vines more right.

But if the soil does not come back again

But overflows the trench itself, why, then

The earth is thick; look out for rigid lumps

And keep an eye out for reluctant clumps 290

Of earth; when ploughing, let strong oxen pull

Your plough, and as for meadows that are full

Of salt, called bitter, no fruits will they bear,

And they cannot be tamed with the ploughshare:

Nor wine nor apples their good reputation

It won't maintain but show your confirmation

Of their ineptitude. Then take away

Baskets and winepress-strainers that you may

Tramp down the land with water from the spring,

And you will see the moisture trickling 300

Away in ample drops, and one harsh bite

Is apt to twist the mouths of those who might

Attempt to eat its produce. Soil that's rich

Won't crack when tossed about but clings like pitch

Between the fingers. Lands that are replete

With moisture are prolific more than meet:



Such lands I'll never want, nor wish that they,  
With first shoots, make so vigorous a display.  
Both light and heavy lands will by their weight  
Betray themselves: a glance will tell you straight 310

Their colour. But it's had to track the signs  
Of that pernicious cod, for only pines,  
Ivies and yews reveal occasionally  
Their traces. Having heard this, you should be  
Careful to scorch your land and then to hew  
The mighty clods in pits and bare them to  
The breezes from the north before therein  
You introduce the vine's prolific kin.

Fields are the best that have a crumbling soil -  
Hoar-frosts and breezes and the delver's toil, 320  
Which shakes and moves the land untiringly  
Make sure of that. We must relentlessly  
Find other plots so that we may prepare  
The vines for their supporting trees or where  
They may be planted later, so that they  
At this sharp change of soil won't feel dismay.

The region of the sky each faced they score  
Upon the bark so that they may restore  
The side which bore the south's torridity  
And that which faced the northern regions: we 330  
Learn this when young. Whether on plain or hill  
You think it best to plant your vineyard, still  
Inquire first! For if you measure out  
Rich acres on some plain, then feel no doubt  
To plant thick, for thereby the vine is found

Fertile, but if upon a rising mound  
You plant them, you must give the rows some space:  
Then, when the vines are all set in their place,  
The paths must with a clear-cut boundary  
Be squared off tidily. As frequently, 340  
When cohorts are deployed and far and near  
The blazing arms of warriors appear,  
The wide earth flickers while hostilities  
Have yet to start between two enemies,  
So line up all the rows symmetrically,  
Not only since the sight's aesthetically  
Pleasing to you, since, if this is not so,  
The earth an equal vigour will not show  
To all, and thus the boughs will not extend.  
How deep should be the trenches? I'd depend 350  
Even upon a vine that may possess  
A shallow furrow, but you must impress  
The tree deep in the earth, especially  
The oak, which stretches high as equally  
It thrusts its roots into the vaults of hell.  
No storms nor blasts nor showers of rain will quell  
This tree or wrench it from its bed – it stays  
Unshaken and will outlive countless days,  
Extending its strong branches far and wide  
And offering its shade on either side. 360  
Don't let your vineyard slope to make it face  
The setting sun, and hazels have no place  
Among the vines. You must not take away  
The topmost shoots for cuttings – they must stay!

Nor from the top of the supporting tree  
Tear off the plants – such is their amity  
Of earth! Don't wound young plants with blunted blade  
And do not the wild olive's trunks invade  
With grafting. Farmers often cause a spark  
Through their neglect, which nestles in the dark           370  
Of the moist rind at first, but presently  
It mounts the leaves with a cacophony  
Of crackling, then through the boughs up high  
It reigns supremely in the spacious sky,  
Enveloping the grove with robes of fire,  
With pitch-black vapour, moving ever higher,  
Murky and reeking, principally, though,  
If some great turbulence has swooped down low  
Upon the forest and the conflagration  
Becomes subject to the proliferation                       380  
Of driving winds. When that is so, then they  
Lose their root-force, and, when they're lopped away,  
They can't recover, and the only thing  
Surviving is the olive with its sting  
Of bitter leaves. And you must not agree  
To stir the soil whenever you can see  
That Boreas has breathed on it. The fields  
Are locked by ice-bound winter then, which yields  
No plants, which are fixed, rooted to the earth.  
No, it is best to give your vines their birth               390  
When spring arrives and that white bird now flies  
About, the stork that all the snakes despise,  
Or at fall's earliest frost, or just before

The sun's swift steeds touch on the signals for  
Winter. Fruit should be planted in the spring,  
Which blesses all the groves, earth burgeoning.  
Aether leaps down, embracing his glad wife,  
Might mingling with might, and rears to life  
The teeming seeds. Then bird-song one may hear  
Among the wild greenwoods; and this is near                   400  
The time for herds to couple, and the boon  
The earth yields with increase, and very soon  
The fields will to the warm west winds unlock  
Their bosoms, while soft moisture runs amok.  
The seeds face the new suns with certainty;  
The vine-shoot also buds courageously,  
Not fearing the south wind or rains that spout,  
Brought from the north wind. Each leaf opens out:  
When first the world began I would surmise  
That days like this would shine out and arise                   410  
In such a fashion. Then, it was spring-tide:  
The east wind then its wintry blasts denied  
The world. The flocks of sheep drank sunlight then  
And from the clods an iron race of men  
Sprang up. Beasts thronged the woods, stars thronged the air.  
This heavy strain frail creatures could not bear  
But for a large respite between the heat  
And frost, and Heaven's indulgent arms would meet  
The earth in welcome. What's left to be sung,  
Upon your fields you must strew heavy dung                   420  
But hide it in the fertile earth and place  
Rough shells and porous stone on it, for space

Between them will hold water which will flow  
Down to the earth, and tenuous fumes also,  
Which help to raise the plants. Some have been known  
To press a potsherd or a heavy stone  
Upon it as a shield when showers spout  
And on the fields the Dog-Star visits drought.  
The seeds once planted, it remains to cleave  
The earth with much persistence and to heave                   430  
The hoes or task the soil with your ploughshare  
And drive your sweating bullocks everywhere  
Throughout the vineyard, and then you must hew  
Smooth reeds and sticks, and ashen standards, too,  
And sturdy forks which then your vines may scale,  
Laughing at storms, and through the elm-tops sail  
To Heaven, While your leaves' maturity  
Awaits them, forbear their fragility,  
And while the joyful bough is shooting yet  
With loosened rein, launched on the void, don't set           440  
Your sickle to them: rather, though, take care  
To clip them with your fingers here and there.  
But when with sturdy trunks they stand four-square  
And clasp the elms, strip off the leaves and pare  
The boughs – though earlier they shrank from steel,  
They now restrict their growth and make then feel  
Their strength. Weave hedges, too, and keep from thence  
All beasts while leaves are young and have no sense  
Of suffering; despite excessive heat  
And cold, annoying goats and oxen eat                   450  
Those leaves, as do the heifers and the flocks

Of sheep; no summer on the arid rocks  
Or cold that's thick with hoar-frost will impair  
The leaves as much as sheep which harshly tear  
At them. It's for no other crime indeed  
That goats for Bacchus on the altar bleed  
And on the stage we see old tragedies  
And Theseus' sons throughout the provinces  
Have set up tributes to dramatic craft  
While dancing in the meadows fore and aft                    460  
In tipsy frolic. The Ausonii,  
A race tracing to Troy its ancestry,  
Make merry with rough rhymes and boisterousness,  
With masks of hollowed bark assumed, and bless  
Bacchus with hymns, and on tall trees of pine  
Hang swinging puppet-faces. Every vine  
Produces teeming fruit. The gorge, profound  
Below us, and the hollow vales abound  
Wherever Bacchus turns his comely head,  
And therefore by the god we're duly led                    470  
To honour him with hymns and dishes give  
To him; the goat, with no life left to live,  
Will to the altar by the horn be led,  
Upon whose entrails we will soon be fed  
After on hazel-spits they have been set.  
Dressing the vine's another labour yet,  
A gruelling task. The whole soil must be three  
Or four times separated annually  
With hoes reversed, with all of your plantation  
Disburdened of its leaves. Thus in rotation                    480

The farmer's work returns, for, circling  
Around, the year continues travelling.  
As soon, then, as the vine her leaves has shed  
And from the forests all their pomp has fled,  
Forced by the chill north wind, nevertheless  
The careful farmer thinks with eagerness  
About the coming year – Saturn will pare  
And shape the vine. But, first of all, take care  
To dig the ground up and to clear away  
And set fire to the brushwood and to lay                    490  
Your stakes aside. But be the last to glean  
Your harvest. Twice the thickening shade is seen  
To seize the vine, and twice weeds overrun  
The crop with briars; each task must be done  
But all are toilsome. Though it's fine for you  
To praise extensive acres, farm but few.  
Rough twigs of butcher's-broom are cut as well  
Among the fores-groves and reeds that dwell  
On river-banks. The undressed willow, too,  
Always requires fostering care from you.                    500  
So now the vines are fettered, now each tree  
Lets go the sickle, and now finally  
The dresser sings of his completed rows;  
But even so the ground requires hoes,  
The dust the rakes, and apprehensively  
You will await your grapes' maturity.  
It is quite different with olives, though,  
For they need little husbandry: don't go  
Seeking the sickle or the rake for these

Once they have gripped the soil and borne the breeze. 510

The earth, when with the hooked fang she's laid bare,

Yields moisture for her produce, the ploughshare

Assisting you; thereby you will increase

The olive's fatness, well-beloved of Peace.

Moreover, apples, just as soon as they

Find that their stems are lusty, make their way

Swiftly to Heaven with no help from you.

Meanwhile, the entire grove is swelling, too,

With fruit, and blood-red berries may be found

In every haunt where the wild birds abound. 520

Clover is grazed, and torches made of pine

The forests yield, and nightly fires shine.

Does tending fields give pause to husbandmen?

I ask. Why talk of greater topics, then?

Even the willows and the brooms provide

Herds with green leaves and shepherds thus can hide

From heat within their shade and in their field

Fence in their crops and food for honey yield.

To see Narycia and Cyturus

Flourish with box and pitch entrances us. 530

And to observe the fields that do not owe

A debt to man's endeavour thrills us so.

Even the barren woods of Caucasus,

With furious, riving blasts, yield boons to us -

Pine-logs for ships that sail upon the seas

And, fabric for men's houses, cypress-trees

And cedars. Farmers shave spokes on their wheels,

And we have drums for carts and curved boat-keels.



Willows have twigs enough, and the elm-tree  
Provides us with a multiplicity 540  
Of leaves; myrtle makes spear-shafts; cornel, too,  
Well-tried in war; the Ituraean yew  
Makes bows; lindens and box, that's made to feel  
The lathe, are shaped by craftsmen into steel;  
Upon the Po's hot foam the alder's sent  
Upon its way, and bees are quite content  
To build their domiciles in void cork-trees  
And rotten oaks. What gifts as fine as these  
Do vines vouchsafe? Bacchus, lord of the vine,  
Once turned to crime – three Centaurs, mad with wine,  
He sent off to their deaths (there was Rhoetus  
And Pholos and a third one, Hylaeus),  
For threatening the Lapiths when they shied  
A mighty bowl at them. How gratified  
Would tillers be if their own blessedness  
They recognized, because far from the stress  
Of war the honest soil's there to provide  
Their easy fare! What though a constant tide  
Of courtiers from lofty palaces spew  
And no-one has within his awe-struck view 560  
High pillars with fair tortoise-shell inwrought  
Or robes inlaid with gold or bronze that's brought  
From Ephyre? The white wool that's been clipped  
From flocks has not in Assyrian dyes been dipped,  
Nor has their oil been soiled by rosemary -  
So what? They still have their tranquillity,  
A peaceful life without deceitfulness,

Rich in so many things, the quietness  
Of caves, lakes, cool vales, while they hear the lows  
Of cattle and beneath the trees repose 570  
In comfort. Groves and wild beasts' haunts are there,  
And youths inured to want and patient care,  
Worship and sage old men. When Justice passed  
From Earth, she left with them her very last  
Footprints. Sweet Muses, take me to your care  
Before all other things – your rites I bear,  
Pierced with great passion. Show your starry ways,  
The sun's eclipses and each labouring phase  
Of moons; whence come the earthquakes; how the tide  
Can swell, then burst its barriers, then subside; 580  
Why winter-suns hasten below the sea;  
Why there is a discontinuity  
Upon the lingering night. But if I'm banned  
From knowledge of such things on sea and land,  
Then let me be delighted just to know  
About the countryside and streams that flow  
In valleys, rivers, woods, bereft of fame!  
You plains and Spercheius, o how I aim  
To know you all, and you, Taygete,  
For whom the Spartan maids hold revelry! 590  
Would I were in the valleys of Haemus,  
Delighting in their cool, the pendulous  
Boughs shielding me! He who can comprehend  
Nature is full of cheer, for he can send  
Packing all terrors, snubbing thoughts of death  
And greedy Acheron's loud, roaring breath.

That man who knows the nymphs is blessed as well,  
Who knows the gods who in the country dwell,  
As Pan and old Sylvanus. He won't be  
Seduced by power or fear high majesty 600  
Nor family strife nor Dacians swooping down  
On perjured Danube, Rome's wealth nor the frown  
Of kingdoms that are doomed; the indigent  
He won't mourn or begrudge the opulent.  
He gathers fruit from his own fields and trees,  
And he has not looked on iron decrees,  
The public records or the lunacy  
That haunts the Forum. Others vex the sea  
Or rush to counter enemies: they press  
On courts and palaces; one with success  
Falls on a city so that by and by  
He may drink out of jewelled cups and lie  
On Tyrian rugs; he broods on gold that he  
Has cached; another gazes breathlessly  
Upon the rostra; some men are spellbound  
When high and low give out round after round  
Of their applause, while other men delight  
To cause fraternal bloodshed in a fight  
And leave their long-loved hearth and home to fly  
Elsewhere and live beneath an alien sky. 620  
The farmer turns the soil with his ploughshare,  
The year's hard labour following on from there.  
And he sustains his homestead and his fields  
And his deserving herds: this labour yields  
No respite! And throughout the coming year

Produce abounds, and calves, and many an ear  
Of wheat; the barns are full. But now the chill  
Of winter's here, and now each olive-mill  
Bruises the berries; pigs come from the field  
With acorns cheered; the woods their arbutues yield; 630  
So fall sheds many kinds of fruit, and high  
On sunny rocks the vintage one may spy  
Maturing, and about his lips meanwhile  
Sweet children cling; the chaste house keeps its smile  
Of purity; also, the cows abound  
With milk, and on the lush grass may be found  
Plump kids butting their horns in rivalry.  
The farmer keeps the holy days, for he,  
Around the fire stretched out upon the ground,  
Pours a libation while the bowl is crowned 640  
By friends, and then he sets a target in  
An elm-tree's bark for the swift javelin.  
They strip their bodies for this recreation.  
Such a life of yesteryear the Sabine nation  
Once led, as Remus did and Romulus,  
And it is certain that Etruria thus  
To greatness grew, and Rome, fairest of all,  
Clasped in her single breast, with circling wall,  
The seven hills. Before the Cretan king,  
Before an impious race was banqueting 650  
On slaughtered oxen, such a life down here  
Did golden Saturn lead, and no man's ear  
Had heard the war-trumps blast nor ever yet  
The clang of sword upon the anvil set.

We've travelled many leagues but now our needs  
Encompass unyoking our steaming steeds.

III

I'll celebrate you, great Pales; you, too,  
Admetus, worthy to be sung, and you,  
Lycaean woods and streams. Too celebrated  
Are all themes else which would have captivated  
An idle mind with song. Who does not know  
Of cruel Eurystheus from long ago  
Or vile Busiris? Who has not heard tell  
Of Hylas, Delos, Hippomene as well,  
And ivory-shouldered Pelops, who rode steeds  
Without a trace of fear? I, then, must needs                   10  
Seek out a path that may lift me on high  
That I may through the mouths of people fly  
Triumphant. I will be the first, so long  
As I may live, to sing the Muses' song  
As I return from the Aonian height.  
I, Mantua, shall bring into your sight  
The Idumaeen palm and raise a shrine  
Of marble so that it may brightly shine  
Upon the green plain by the Mincius,  
Which winds about the country, tortuous                   20  
In lazy coils, with tender reeds beside  
Its banks, and Caesar's godhead will abide  
Amid my shrine. I'll be victorious,  
In Tyrian purple dyes conspicuous;

A hundred four-horse chariots I'll drive  
Along the bank for him. All Greece shall strive -  
Leaving Alpheus and Molorchus, she  
Will race or fight with raw-hide glove for me,  
Whilst I, green olive wreathed about my brow,  
Will offer gifts. I'm joyful even now 30  
To lead the people to the sanctuary  
To view the cattle slaughtered and to see  
The setting vanish and the hangings raise  
The Britons woven on them and to gaze  
On doors of gold and ivory and trace  
The battle that was fought against the race  
Near River Ganges, and the Nile which flows  
And foams with battle as we fight our foes,  
And columns with their naval brass piled high;  
And Asia's vanquished cities now will I 40  
Annex, and quelled Niphates and our foe  
From Parthia, who, fleeing, loves to throw  
His darts behind, and, from two enemies  
Two trophies, taken from two different seas,  
And Parian marble will be there for us  
To gaze at, offspring of Assaracus.  
And Tros, and Phoebus, founder of the race  
Of Troy. Atrocious Envy fears to face  
The Furies and grim Cocytus and feel  
Ixion's serpents and the massive wheel 50  
And the remorseless stone of Sisyphus.  
Let's let the Dryads' woodlands welcome us.  
Of me, Maecenas, this demand you make,

Without whom I could never undertake  
 A lofty task. To work! No more delay!  
 When loud Cithaeron calls, we must obey,  
 And Epidaurus and Taygete's pack  
 Of hounds and the groves that send agreement back  
 In echoes. And yet I must soon prepare  
 To sing of Caesar's fiery wars and share 60  
 His name throughout the world that it may last  
 As long as all the years that now have passed  
 Since old Tithonus' birth. If you would breed  
 A horse to win the Olympian palm or need  
 A bullock for your plough, you must select  
 A shapely dam – best mothers are large-necked,  
 Grim-faced, coarse-headed and, from chin to knee,  
 Her dewlaps must hang down: her flank must be  
 Considerable – she must in every way  
 Be large, even her feet: she must display 70  
 Incurving horns and shaggy ears; I might  
 Select a cow presenting spots of white  
 Or one who spurns the yoke that husbandmen  
 Place on her or whose horn would now and then  
 Show viciousness; more like a bull is she  
 In features and she's tall, exceedingly -  
 So in her footprints the end of her tail  
 Will sweep as she ambles along the trail.  
 Four years should pass before the dams will bear  
 Their offspring and start their maternal care 80  
 Of breeding, and the tenth should mark the end,  
 For otherwise they are too weak to tend

To ploughing. Meanwhile, let the males run free  
While in them dwells their youthful ecstasy!  
Be first to speed each bullock to his mate  
And thereby let their race proliferate!  
Men's best days fly so fast; then in their place  
Come sickness and old age, when one must face  
Hard toil and death which sweeps us all away.  
There'll always be some cattle which you may                    90  
Desire to change. Renew them still, lest you  
Seek what's already lost and thereby rue  
What you have thought! Therefore, anticipate  
And choose your young before it is too late  
Steeds crave no less selection, but on those  
That boost your hopes and cause you to propose  
To nurture them bestow much industry!  
The foal that's highly-bred walks loftily  
With gentle steps. Dauntless, he leads the way  
Before the herd, the first one to essay                    100  
The threatening deluge and the first to dare  
The unknown bridge; no empty noise can scare  
This beast, long-necked, short-bellied, with a head  
That's graceful, a stout back, strong muscles spread  
About his sprightly breast. Good colours are  
Chestnut and grey, the worst of all by far  
Sorrel and white. If clash of arms he hears,  
Though at a distance, he pricks up his ears,  
His limbs ashudder, snorting fire through  
His nostrils, and his mane's luxuriant, too,                    110  
Tossed back on his right shoulder, while a spine



Along his thighs runs in a double line,  
 And as his hoof makes scratches on the ground  
 It makes the horn give out a ringing sound.  
 Thus Pollux tamed his Cyllarus, and thus,  
 As bards in early Greece recall for us,  
 Mars tamed his steeds, Achilles too; as well,  
 Saturn flung loose his mane and ran pell-mell  
 To greet his wife and neighed most piercingly  
 To Pelion's heights. If, though, sore malady                      120  
 Or sluggish age now saps his sturdiness,  
 Pen him – now old, he's lost his lustfulness,  
 Useless in toil, and, when there comes a fight,  
 He rages idly, as a fire might  
 In stubble when weak; mark down particularly  
 Their age and zest, later their pedigree,  
 Or find out what disquiet they abide  
 When they have lost the contest or what pride  
 They feel in winning. Can't you see how they  
 Race through the barrier as on their way                      130  
 They gallop while their youthful hope is high  
 And every heart is racing? How they ply  
 The circling whip and let the reins hang free!  
 See how the glowing wheel spins rapidly  
 Now high, now low, they seem to be conveyed  
 Through space and towering high: they won't be stayed.  
 The sand whirls, and with flakes of foam they reek  
 As with their fervid breath the goal they seek.  
 So sweet is fame, so prized is victory!  
 Erichthonius was first in history                      140

To yoke his chariot with four steeds and ride  
Above the whirling wheels and in his pride  
Gain victory. The Lapiths gave the ring  
And bridle to the riders, tutoring  
The knights in arms always to spurn the ground.  
Each task is hard – for each there must be found  
A young and swift and fiery horse, although  
Often your rival chased his flying foe,  
Boasting of Epirus, his native land  
Or great Mycenae, while his lineage spanned 150  
Straight back to Neptune's birth. Once this they learn,  
As the time draws nigh, with instant zeal they turn  
To plumping up the beast that they've preferred  
And chosen as the leader of the herd:  
They cut up herbs and serve him well with wheat  
And water so that in the very heat  
Of love he may not fail and thus beget  
A family of puny colts. And yet  
They cut back on the fatness of the herd,  
And when to lustfulness the beasts are spurred, 160  
No leafy food's allowed and from the spring  
They're penned; thus often they start quivering  
While running, tiring in the noonday heat.  
The threshing-floor groans heavily as the wheat  
Is pounded, while the chaff is westward cast  
In case the fertile soil is not held fast  
By surfeiting, lest any mud impede  
The furrows but will seize upon the seed,  
Absorbing all the love passionately.

However, now responsibility 170

Shifts to the mother, as her belly starts  
To show – she must not now pull heavy carts  
Or leap around the roads or madly race  
About or range among the fields or face  
A rapid river. One must let her graze  
In open glades, by brimming streams to laze,  
Where there are mossy banks and verdure green  
And sheltering grottoes and a rock to screen  
Her from the sun. A gadfly (*asilus*

They call it in our land, although *oestrus* 180

Is what it's named in Greece) buzzes around  
The groves of Silacus – it's also found  
Among Alburnian oaks, and it is fierce  
And in great numbers, and its buzzings pierce  
The eardrums as it drives whole herds in fear  
Throughout the groves till Heaven goes mad to hear  
Their din, as did Tanagra's arid bed  
And forest-banks. Queen Juno, it is said,  
Heard it of old and she was terrorized,

And in her anger she a plague devised - 190

She changed Io into a heifer. Keep  
It from the pregnant herd, for it will sweep  
More fiercely in the noonday sun: so graze  
The cattle once you see the new sun's rays  
And once you see the stars of evening glare.  
But, yearning ended, turn your tender care  
To all the calves and at once stamp a brand  
Upon each one that you may understand

Its lineage and which of them to breed  
Or sacrifice or those that you will need 200  
To cleave the ground and into ridges rend  
And turn the sod; the others you should send  
To graze at will. But you must train each one  
You want for farming tasks which must be done  
And start to tame them while their minds are young  
And pliant. Loose loops of willow should be hung  
Around their shoulders: once they are inured  
To servitude, yoke them in pairs, secured  
By those loops, thus compelling them to take  
Their steps in tandem, and thereafter make 210  
Each pair pull empty carts; eventually  
Let the beech-axle creak exhaustedly  
Beneath a heavy load which they must tow,  
While there's a metal pole that's meant to slow  
The wheels. Untamed, they must not just be fed  
On grass and willow-leaves and sedge: no, head  
Out to the fields and pluck out with your hand  
The ears of corn that grow upon your land.  
And do not let the milk-pail overflow  
With mothers' milk. For her sweet calves must grow 220  
Upon it. But if you have hopes of war  
And honoured squadrons or are eager for  
Gliding by Alpheus or driving through  
The groves of Jupiter, the first task you  
Must take on with your horse is to inure  
Him to brave men and arms and to endure  
The sound of trumpets and not to feel fear

Of groaning wheels and not to quake to hear  
The jingling bridles in the stall: and he  
Must love to hear the trainer's flattery 230  
With pats upon his neck. This he has need  
To learn, once weaned; and sometimes he must cede  
His mouth to the halter while he's weak of limb,  
But once he's four years old, do not let him  
Be slow to start to run around the ring,  
While you may hear his hoof-beats echoing  
With even pace, his legs alternately  
Bending in curves, so that he seems to be  
Struggling; and then challenge him to race  
Against the wind and, launched at breakneck pace, 240  
As if unreined, see him scarce touch the sand,  
Like a dense wind blown from some northern land,  
The Scythian storms and dry clouds scattering.  
With light gusts corn and plain are rippling  
And start to shiver, while a sound is heard  
Along the forest-tops: fast as a bird,  
Long waves race shoreward, sweeping fields and sea.  
Upon the course at Elis similarly  
A steed perspires as he makes for home,  
While from his mouth he casts out flakes of foam, 250  
Or else – a kindlier task – he patiently  
Supports the chariot. Then, finally,  
When they are tamed, with corn-mash feed them well,  
For when untamed, their pride will wax and swell,  
And once they have been caught they won't abide  
The whip, and the harsh curb they'll cast aside.

But whether in herds or steeds you take delight,  
No diligence more magnifies their might  
Than curbing their desire and hidden lust.  
To lonely, distant fields the bull, then, must                   260  
Be sent, across a river and behind  
A hill, inside a well-kept pen confined.  
A steed is weakened when he sees a mare  
For slowly she inflames him and his care  
For grass and groves will vanish. She compels  
Her beaux to fight until one victor quells  
The rest. In Sila's forest one may see  
A fair cow's lovers spar in rivalry.  
The black blood splashes as they push and strive  
With their opposing horns, trying to rive                   270  
Each other's flesh with many a groaning sound,  
And as the forest echoes all around,  
Olympus bellows back. Once they have vied  
Against each other, they won't all reside  
In one stall -no, the loser will exile  
Himself by travelling many a mile  
To some far region in humiliation,  
Unable to achieve retaliation  
With one glance at the byre, his ancient reign  
Now lies behind him. So, with many a pain                   280  
He works hard to regain his former might,  
Reposing on the stony ground each night,  
On prickly leaves and pointed rushes fed;  
He tests himself by butting with his head  
A tree and through his horns he learns to fling

His wrath; he goads the air and, scattering  
Great clouds of sand, he readies for the fight.  
Then, when he has collected all his might,  
He runs against his fancied enemy,  
As when a wave is seen far out at sea 290  
To whiten, mustering its rounded breast  
And rolling to the land, a mighty crest,  
And fall among the rocks upon the shore,  
Huge as a mountain, with a thunderous roar;  
The depths seethe up in eddies, though, and throw  
The murky sand once hidden far below.  
All men, all birds, all beasts on sea and land  
Rush to the raging flame, for Love's command  
Is total, for it makes the lioness  
Sweep fiercely through the plain in lustfulness, 300  
Regardless of her young ones; and all through  
The forests monstrous bears cause havoc, too.  
The tigress and the boar are nocuous;  
To roam in Libya's plains is dangerous.  
Mark how the stallion is quivering  
If but a waft that well-known breeze will bring!  
They cannot be controlled by curb or lash  
Or rocks or caverned crags or floods that crash  
And whirl and wash the hills away. Then see  
The great Sabellian boar as rapidly 310  
He runs! He whets his tusks, with forefoot scrubs  
The ground, against a tree his sides he rubs  
To harden them. Recall Leander, who  
Felt love's relentless power flaring through

His veins! He swims the gulf at dead of night  
 While storm-clouds burst about him and the height  
 Of Heaven thunders and a warning cry  
 Comes from the rock-strewn sea; his parents try  
 In vain to call him, as does Hero, she  
 Whom he adores, whose piteous destiny                      320  
 Was dying before her time. Where is the need  
 To speak of Bacchus' lynx or the canine breed  
 Of wolves and dogs? Why should I also speak  
 Of how a timorous stag would battle seek?  
 The rage of mares is well-known, boosted by  
 Venus herself when once in Potniae  
 Four horses ate Glaucus. Delirious  
 With love, they wander far past Gargarus  
 And the Ascanian flood, and they defy  
 The torrents that they swim and climb up high                      330  
 On mountains, and when in their eager core  
 The fire is conceived – though never more  
 Than in the warm spring once the winter's gone -  
 They stand on rocky heights and gaze upon  
 The west and sniff the breezes. Frequently  
 Unmated (this is quite extraordinary!)  
 The breeze impregnates them, and then they race  
 Across the crags and vales; nor do they face  
 The east, the sun's abode, but north and west,  
 Where Heaven with rainy Auster is oppressed;                      340  
 And then out of their groins progressively  
 There drips a poison (shepherds accurately  
 Call it hippomanes) – stepmothers pick



This frequently to make their children sick,  
 Blended with herbs and spells. We can't get back  
 The fleeting time when I have kept close track  
 Of lust. Enough of herds, for there remains  
 Treatment of sheep and goats: this calls for pains.  
 Brave farmers, here lies fame. It's hard to deal  
 With this in written words and to reveal 350  
 The lustre of a theme so slight, but still  
 I'm caught upon the lone Parnassian hill  
 By sweet desire. I love to roam around  
 The ridges, where no other track is found  
 Down to Castalia. More sonorously  
 Sing out, revered Pales! First, I decree  
 Gentle enclosures where your sheep may graze  
 Until the swift return of summer days;  
 With straw and fern litter the earth lest chill  
 Of ice should cause the tender cattle ill 360  
 With scab and foot-rot. I urge you to feed  
 The goats with arbutle-leaves, for these they need.  
 Serve them spring-water! Their enclosures place  
 Out of the wind, in order that they face  
 The winter sun, avoiding hot midday,  
 When chill Aquarius sinks with a spray  
 Of showers as the year comes to an end.  
 With no less care the goats, too, you must tend:  
 The gain will be no less, although you may  
 Find that Milesian fleeces well may pay 370  
 You more, in Tyrian purple being dyed.  
 More offspring and more milk will they provide.

The more the udder froths the pail below,  
The sooner will the teat-pressed torrents flow.  
Cinyphian he-goats have their grey beards lopped,  
While all their hairy bristles, too, are cropped  
For use in camps and as a covering  
For wretched sailors. See them pasturing  
In woods or on Lycaeus' heights, among  
The briars and the thorny plants that throng 380  
Up high! They wander home, showing the way  
To their young kids: the mothers' udders sway  
With so much milk that they can scarcely climb  
The threshold. Therefore, since they need less time  
For tending to, protect them with due care  
From ice and snowy winds, and bring them fare  
Of twigs and fodder! And your lofts of hay  
Don't close for winter! But when comes the day  
Presaging joyful summer, following  
The call of the west wind and summoning 390  
The sheep and goats to pasture, it is best  
To run to the cool fields whilst in the west  
The sun is setting and the day is new,  
The grass still white, and on the blades the dew  
Is sweetest to the flocks. Then when the day  
Is four hours old and we desire to stay  
Our thirst, and the cicadas vex the trees  
With noise, I'll have the flocks drink at their ease  
From oaken troughs where wells and deep pools flow,  
And in the noonday heat make sure they go 400  
Into a valley's shade, where some oak-tree,

Ancient and vast, its leaves extensively  
Spreads over them, or where there is a glade  
Where thick ilexes lie in sacred shade.  
Give them a little water and some fare  
Till sunset, when the evening soothes the air,  
While dewy moonbeams slake the glades once more,  
The halcyon's notes resounding on the shore,  
The goldfinch ringing out in every stand  
Of brush. The shepherds of the Libyan land                    410  
I'll sing, their scattered huts and where they graze  
Their flocks, who'll often browse for thirty days  
And nights together, often going far  
Into deserted regions where there are  
No sheltered places, flat and measureless.  
The Libyan farmers bear all they possess  
With them – their arms, their quivers fashioned by  
A Cretan craftsman, hounds from Amyclae,  
Their homes: just like the Romans on the road  
They hurry, burdened by their cruel load.                    420  
They halt and pitch their camps before their foe  
Expects to see them. But it is not so  
With Scythian tribes where the Maeotis flows  
And where the river Danube wildly throws  
Its yellow sand, where vast Mt. Rhodope  
Touches the sky. There, for security,  
They keep their herds penned in, and no-one sees  
Grass on the plains or leaves upon the trees,  
And formless mounds of snow lie everywhere  
And ice that rises seven metres. There                    430

It's always winter, where the North winds whine  
With constant chill and where the sun won't shine  
Enough to rout the mists, whether he scales  
The heights, borne by his team of steeds, or trails  
His chariot in the red waves of the sea.  
Ice-floes appear in rivers suddenly,  
Where soon the water on its face will bear  
Broad carts instead of boats: and everywhere  
Bronze cracks and raiments freeze upon one's back,  
And people will with axes have to hack 440  
Their wine. Whole pools become one frozen pile,  
While beards are clogged with icicles. Meanwhile,  
The snow keeps falling, and the cattle die,  
And mighty oxen stand surrounded by  
The frost, while herds of stags are huddling,  
Benumbed by this strange weight, scarce surfacing  
Above its mass, their antlers barely spied.  
The people there don't hunt those beasts or ride  
To hounds or with their bright plumes cause them fear -  
Oh no, armed with their knives, they venture near 450  
To kill them as great blocks of snow they fight  
Against and cause the beasts to howl in fright  
And pain. Themselves in deep-cut caverns dwell,  
Happy and free. Oak-trees and elms they fell  
And haul them to their hearths and burn them there  
To spend the night in glee without a care.  
And they instead of cups of wine and beer  
Drink acid berry-juice in festive cheer.  
Beneath the seven-starred plough their life is free,

Though primitive, belaboured constantly 460

By Eurus from the hills; their bodies gain

Warmth from the tawny hides of beasts they've slain.

If you like wool, first keep your meadows free

Of thistles, burrs and all things prickly!

Avoid rich pastures! Choose flocks that are white:

The ram, however white he is, just might

Have a black tongue – reject him lest he stain

His offspring! Go about the teeming plain

To find another one. With wool, they say,

The god of Arcady lured you away, 470

O Moon, into the deep woods – nor did you

Reject his charismatic call. He who

Wishes to get milk from his flock has need

For clover, lotus and salt herbs to feed,

Frequently given to them, and to this end -

They'll love the streams the more as they extend

Their udders, giving back a subtlety

Of saltiness in their milk. Many there be

Who from the mothers keep the kids away

When they are newly-born and then straightway 480

With muzzles bind their mouths. At night they make

Cheese of the milk they obtained at daybreak

Or in the daylight hours; what eventide

Or sunset yeans them they transport inside

Baskets at dawn to town and, furthermore,

They add a touch of salt for winter store.

And do not let the dogs be your last care:

Feed Spartan and Molossian hounds their fare

Of whey – with these as watchdogs never fear  
Hoodlums from Spain approaching from the rear,        490  
Or ravening wolves or burglars in the night.  
Often the shy wild asses in their flight  
You'll chase or, with your hounds, hunt doe or hare  
Or from his woodland den the boar you'll scare,  
When those hounds bay, and in the mountains lure  
A bellowing stag into your toils. Be sure  
To learn to burn some cedar in the stable  
And with the fumes of galbanum be able  
To oust the smell of snakes. For frequently  
Under neglected stalls a snake you'll see,        500  
Or viper, that is cowering in fright  
And seeking some protection from the light,  
Tainting the herd with poison's miseries  
While creeping on the ground. So, shepherd, seize  
Some stakes and stones! Then, as he starts to rise  
While hissing at you, cause the brute's demise!  
In flight his timid crest he lowers deep  
And loosens all his spirals with a sweep  
Of his tail's tip and slowly draws away  
The final wrinkle with a sinuous sway.        510  
The water-snake we in Calabria find -  
He lifts his head, his nether regions, lined  
With scales, are writhing down upon the ground,  
His belly spotted. While fountains are found  
To gush, and when the showers of the spring  
Bring rainy southern breezes, moistening  
The earth, this vicious creature dwells beside

The banks while fish and frogs he crams inside  
His black and greedy maw. Once fens are dry  
And the whole earth gapes with heat, he'll fly 520  
To dwell inside that dry, and, as he flies,  
He'll rage across the fields and roll his eyes  
Of fire, mad with thirst and full of dread  
To face the heat. Then I'll not make my bed  
Beneath the sky upon the grass when he  
Casts off his skin and, gleaming youthfully,  
Slithers away, his young abandoning,  
And towers in the sunlight, flickering  
His three-forked tongue. This topic I'll now change  
To teach you causes of disease. The mange 530  
Attacks one's sheep when chill rain to the quick  
Has penetrated them and made them sick,  
And winter's frost and, at the termination  
Of shearing, unextinguished perspiration  
Cleaves to them when their bodies have been rent  
With thorns. The situation, then, has sent  
The shepherds to a running stream where they  
Have plunged them in the flood to wash away  
The sweat. The rain, fleece drenched, is then launched free  
To drift down with the tide. Alternatively, 540  
Once they've been shorn, they smear their sheep with some  
Acrid oil-lees and mix in silver-scum,  
Sulphur, Idaean pitch, wax, mollified  
With ointment, and sea-onions and, beside  
All this, black bitumen and hellebore.  
But fortune cannot crown one's labour more

Than by piercing the ulcer with a knife,  
Since by confinement taints prolong their life.  
So if a shepherd should his healing hand  
Withdraw or think to wait for Heaven's command,      550  
And when the bones are sunk in rage and pain,  
The lambs consumed with thirst, the fever drain  
And pierce a vein inside the hoof – that's seen  
With the Bisaltic tribes to be routine!  
The eager Scythian achieves no less  
When he flees to the Thracian wilderness  
And Rhodope to drink the milk that's made  
From horses' blood. If in the gentle shade  
You see a sheep wandering far away,  
Cropping the grass-blades in a listless way,      560  
Or one who lags behind and suddenly  
Falls down while he is grazing on the lea  
Or moves apart alone late in the night,  
At once take up your knife and check the blight  
Before the dreadful malady should creep  
Untreated through the flock of heedless sheep.  
Such plagues as this are more life-threatening  
Than is the whirlwind that, encumbering  
The ocean's waves, brings tempests in its wake.  
And it is not one single life they take -      570  
They clear whole feeding-grounds and crush the breed.  
A man would understand this fact indeed  
If he should see, with many years gone by,  
The Noric hill-forts and the Alps on high  
And the Timavian fields – a wilderness



Untenanted! A fearsome fieriness  
Disturbed the heavens many years ago -  
An autumn bringing every creature low.  
The pools and fodder were contaminated;  
Even the mode of death was complicated: 580  
The veins were filled with fiery thirstiness,  
Their bodies shrivelled, and a wateriness  
Welled up, their bones sapped with impurity  
Little by little. Also, frequently,  
Mid-sacrifice, some victim, with its head  
Half-wreathed with wool, would suddenly fall dead.  
Or if it had been killed, there were some days  
When on the shrines the entrails would not blaze,  
And no response was given by the seer,  
The knife scarce tinged with blood, with just a smear 590  
Upon the surface of the sand. Thereby  
The calves in many a fair pasture die,  
Or even in their cribs. Thereby as well  
Dogs go mad and the jaws of porkers swell  
And with a cough they choke; the conquering steed,  
Now wretched in his efforts, pays no heed  
To grass, refusing drink and frequently  
Pawing the ground, ears drooping dolefully,  
With cold and fitful sweats; the skin is dry  
And hideous. These first signs prophecy 600  
His ultimate demise. But if the blight  
Grows fiercer, there will be a fiery light  
About his eyes, his breathing labouring  
At times and there is lengthy whimpering

In his low flanks, and from his nostrils flows  
Black blood; a scaly tongue attempts to close  
His jaws. They thought that giving him wine-juice  
Was the sole cure, but this was of no use;  
His frenzy is renewed and at the end  
Of life – would that the heavenly gods should send     610  
The just a happier fate, insanity  
To those for whom they harbour enmity! -  
With his own teeth he ravenously claws  
His limbs. Observe the bull who, as he draws  
The stubborn plough, falls smouldering to the ground  
And spews black blood mixed with foam as to the sound  
Of his last groan he dies. The other bull  
Is unyoked, feeling very sorrowful  
For his coworker, and the farmer's blade  
Is left stuck fast in mid-toil. No wood's shade,             620  
No gentle stream, than amber mellower,  
Seeking the plain upon the stones, can stir  
His heart, his flanks weakening and his eyes  
Now dulled with deadly torpor as he dies.  
What labour or profit can please him now?  
That he has turned the dense sod with the plough?  
No gifts of Massic wine or frequently  
Repeated feasts have caused him injury.  
He grazed on leaves and grass and drank from clear  
Fountains and rivers which swiftly career             630  
Upon their course, untroubled by distress  
And sleeping soundly. Then, as folk profess,  
And only then, the people searched the land

For bulls for Juno's ceremonies, and  
 Ill-matched bullocks up to the sanctuary  
 Would draw the chariots. Men painfully  
 Would rake and grub the soil and in the ground  
 Dig in the seeds with their own nails. Around  
 The uplands they would strain their necks to tow  
 The creaking carts. Back then no wolf would go       640  
 About the pens and fields night after night.  
 One's now distracted by a stronger fright:  
 Among the dogs now walk swift stags and deer  
 And all about the homes. There now appear  
 All swimming creatures, washed up on the shore,  
 Like corpses from some shipwreck; furthermore,  
 Seals swim into the rivers from the sea;  
 The viper dies, defended fruitlessly  
 In his own winding nest, the serpents there  
 Astonished by his upright scales. The air       650  
 Itself disturbs the birds – headlong they fall  
 To earth. A change of pasture not at all  
 Will be of any help: the remedies  
 They look for only cause more injuries,  
 While doctors die – Chiron, Philyra's son,  
 Melampus, too, son of Amythaon.  
 Raging Tisiphone, sent to the light  
 From Stygian darkness, drives Disease and Fright  
 In front of her while rising on her way,  
 Her greedy head uplifting day by day.       660  
 The rivers and dry banks and hills resound  
 To flocks that bleat with their unending sound.

She ravages the herds, whose bodies pile  
Up in the very stalls, decayed with vile  
Disease until they're finally interred  
In pits, covered with earth. Hides of that herd  
May not be used at all, nor can the meat  
Be cleansed or even cooked with fire's heat.  
The fleeces, full of plague and filth, cannot  
Be shorn, nor can the yarn, decayed with rot, 670  
Be touched. These clothes, once handled, one would find,  
Cause horrid sweat and blisters that would wind  
About one's stinking limbs, and soon the flame  
Would eat away at one's infected frame.

#### IV

The gift of Heaven, air-born honey, I'll  
Now treat of. And now indulgently, meanwhile,  
Look on, Maecenas! I'll give a display  
Of puny things, told in a splendid way -  
High-hearted chiefs, a nation's history,  
Its aims, its clans, its wars, its quality:  
All these will pass before you while I sing.  
Although the poet's theme be footling,  
The praise will not be so while Heaven can be  
Supportive and Phoebus listens to me. 10  
First find your bees a sure and settled hive,  
Free from the winds (for winds can surely drive  
The foragers back), where sheep and kids won't leap  
About among the flowers and you may keep

The cows from brushing all the dew away  
Upon the grassy meadows, as they stray,  
And harm the springing blades. Be sure as well  
To keep the lizard from their honeyed cell  
And birds that feed on bees, and all the rest,  
And Procne, she who sports a blood-stained breast,     20  
Since they cause devastation everywhere  
And, as the bees are flying through the air,  
They take them in their beaks, then homeward fly  
To feed their chicks. But let there be nearby  
Some limpid springs and pools, with moss bright green,  
And a small stream, and let a palm-tree screen  
The entrance, or an olive-tree, thereby  
Allowing the new chiefs as out they fly  
To lead the swarms, which start to sport and play;  
The neighbouring bank may lure them all away     30  
And cool them, or a branch will maybe throw  
Shade on them. Over waters, whether they flow  
Or not, cast branches and large stones that they  
Can find a place to take their ease and splay  
Their wings to summer's sun, lest there should sweep  
An easterly wind and plunge into the deep  
The tardy ones. And let green cassias be  
Blooming around them all, and savoury  
Whose breath is heavy-laden. Also let  
The springs sip from the beds of violet     40  
Sweetness. And for the hive, whether it's wrought  
Of hollow bark or osier, take thought  
To make the entrance thin, for winters chill

Congeals their store, and summers swelter will  
Resolve and thaw, grievous to every bee,  
And that is why the swarm industriously  
Cements the pores that pierce the walls and pack  
With pollen from the flowers every crack,  
And to this end they glean and keep the glue  
Which binds more quickly than bird-lime can do       50  
Or Ida's pine-pitch. Or, if what they say  
Is accurate, they also dig their way  
Into the earth and live beneath the ground  
In comfort, and in hollowed rocks they're found  
Or in an ancient tree. Smear with warm clay  
The hives, with leaves on top, and keep away  
From them the yew; and don't roast crabs; beware  
The marsh or any muddy smell or where  
A rock rings when it's struck and there's a sound  
That on its impact is heard to rebound.               60  
When now the sun has put winter to flight  
And opened Heaven with the summer's light,  
They roam the glades and forests straightaway  
And reap the flowers and sip the streams as they  
Hover above them. Thus, with ecstasy  
Unknown to us, they rear their progeny;  
New wax and clinging honey they prepare;  
So when you see them floating in the air,  
Out of the hive, and marvel at the way  
The swarm is spread out by the wind as they       70  
Escape, observe them well, for then you'll see  
Them seek fresh springs and leafy sanctuary.

Bruised balm and the wax-flower's lowly weed  
You must bring to them, as I have decreed.  
Rattle the cymbals of great Cybele -  
Theyll settle on them soporifically.  
But if they battle (for it's often seen  
That quarrels have been taken up between  
Two kings, and then at once, though far away,  
You will discern what fervency can sway 80  
The mob: the lingerers are chided on  
By that which warriors know, the clarion,  
And one may hear the notes that mock that sound;  
Then in hot haste they muster all around  
And flash their wings, sharpening their beaks, flexing  
Their legs while round their leader gathering:  
Inside his royal quarters they all crowd  
While challenging their enemy out loud.  
So when a bright spring day has been revealed  
To them and they have found an open field, 90  
They burst out of their gates and fall headlong,  
All heaped and rolled into one mighty throng -  
No hail is heavier and no oak-tree  
Can cast down acorns so exhaustively.  
The leaders, by their wings conspicuous,  
Press through the fray, their giant animus  
Packed in a pygmy frame; they never yield  
Until one side in flight has left the field.  
A few small flecks of dust, though, will suppress  
These mighty frays caused by their eagerness. 100  
Then for the weaker king let your decree

Be death, to sidestep prodigality,  
 Letting the other reign. The stronger kind  
 Will shine with specks of gold, being inclined  
 To better looks, his reddish armour bright,  
 The weaker one is a pathetic sight,  
 Squalid and fat and ugly. It's the same  
 With subjects as with kings – some have a frame  
 That is unsightly, roughly bristling,  
 As someone who has long been travelling 10  
 On dusty roads and finally can spew  
 The dirt out; and yet there are others who  
 Sparkle with specks of gleaming gold. And they  
 Are stronger: when the time is right, you may  
 Take honey from them, not as sweet as bright  
 And mellowing on the tongue the fiery light  
 Of Bacchus. But when swarms fly aimlessly  
 And spurn the cells and gambol joyfully,  
 Leaving the hive unwarmed, you have to stay  
 Their volatile desires for such vain play - 120  
 No arduous task: you merely need to tear  
 The leaders' wings off. While they linger there,  
 They won't dare fly to Heaven or pluck away  
 The standards from the camp. With saffron they  
 May be allured. Let Priapus, who reigns  
 Over the Hellespont, he who maintains  
 The willow-scythe, keep off the thievery  
 Of birds and human beings both. Then he  
 Who cares about such things brings thyme and pine  
 And strews them round the hives in one broad line; 130



And he alone this blistering work must do,  
Planting young slips, with genial flowers, too.  
And I myself, were I not even now  
Furling my sails, eager to turn my prow  
To shore, near journey's end, would maybe sing  
About what systematic husbanding  
Can make a garden show its pageantry,  
And of twice-blooming Paestum, and from me  
You'd hear about how endives take such pride  
In streams they drink from and the riverside                    140  
Adores its parsley, and I'd also tell  
Of how the cucumber can twist and swell.  
Of slow Narcissus, too, I've not said nought,  
And supple-stemmed acanthus; I have brought  
Praise to the pallid ivies; furthermore,  
The myrtles clinging to their well-loved shore.  
Beneath the shade of tall Oechalia, where  
Galaesus moistens his bright fields, I swear  
I came across an old Corycian who  
Had wretched land whose acres were but few                    150  
And hardly fruitful and of little use  
For herds or for the making of the juice  
Of vines: yet he upon the thorny ground  
Would plant his meager garden-herbs – all round  
Were lilies, vervain, poppies, and his pride  
Matched that of monarchs. Way past eventide  
He'd come back home, his riches plentiful,  
Unpurchased, and he was the first to cull  
The rose in spring and ripe fruits in the fall;

Before the winter, in his sullen gall, 160

Still plagued the rocks with frost and icily

Immoblized the waters, there was he

Plucking the hyacinth, annoyed to see

Summer's sloth and the West Wind's lethargy.

So his first swarms prevailed with copiousness,

And from the comb he was the first to press

The bubbling honey; and he now possessed

Lime-trees and many a branching pine, while blessed

With early apples, all perfected through

The work of mellowing autumn; elm-trees, too, 170

He grafted in a row, tough pears and plums

And plane-trees drinkers use to park their bums

In shade. But I will leave the topic, bound

Too narrowly, and let others expound

On it. Now I'll unfold the qualities

That Jove himself bestowed upon the bees

For feeding him when he was but a child,

Brought up in the Dictaeon cave, beguiled

By the Curetes' brass. Exclusively

They rear the young of their community 180

In common in one domicile. All bees

Live in the shelter of splendid decrees.

Alone they know one home and native land;

In summer, warned that winter is at hand,

They hoard their harvesting, some taking care

To feed the hive in labouring elsewhere,

While others stay enclosed within their home

And lay the first foundations of the comb

With gum, Narcissus' tear, and glue from trees  
And hang the wax; some lead the younger bees, 190  
The hope of all their race, to pack and stuff  
Their store of purest honey, quite enough  
To burst the cells; and there are others who  
Are charged to man the entrance with the view  
Of watching for black skies or offering  
To give assistance to the ones who bring  
Their load back from the field; some form a band  
To drive the lazy drones away. How grand  
Their work is! And the honey from the bees  
Is sweet with thyme, as when the Cyclopes 200  
Forge lightning-bolts while quickly, from rough ore,  
They make the ox-hide bellows loudly roar;  
Some dip bronze in a stream which makes the sound  
Of hissing, while, with anvils all around,  
Mt. Etna groans, and then alternately  
And with the tongs' gripping tenacity  
They twist the metal. Matching small with great,  
Love of creation tends to stimulate  
The bees, who in old Cecrops' summits stray,  
Each one of them in its specific way. 210  
The older bees have all been left behind  
To look after the premises, assigned  
To build the combs and the ingeniously-  
Constructed cells. At night-time wearily  
The younger ones, the labourers, come back  
And they are carrying many a bulging sack  
Of thyme and then they graze extensively

On strawberry-trees, bright saffron, rosemary,  
Pale willows, hyacinths and rich lime-trees.  
Each one has but one break to take some ease,                   220  
Though but one task. Then at the break of day  
They rush out through the gates without delay.  
Then once more, when the star of evening  
Bids them to set aside their pasturing,  
They fly off home to rest: then there's the sound  
Of hums and buzzing going all around  
The doors, until at last they're pacified,  
Their weary limbs by slumber occupied.  
If rain looms, they don't stray or trust the sky  
When Easterlies are close, but from nearby                   230  
Go to fetch water in security  
And briefly fly about and frequently  
Lift little stones, as in tempestuous seas  
Unstable ships use ballast, and with these  
Balance themselves up in the clouds. You might  
Wonder at this, which gives the bees delight,  
And why they do not copulate, unknown  
To them the pangs of labour. On their own  
The mothers gather up their progeny  
From leaves and honeyed herbs: subsequently                   240  
New kings and subjects to their hives they bring,  
Repairing their own realm. While wandering  
On sharp stones, frequently their wings they fray  
And consequently breathe their lives away.  
They love the flowers deeply, and the store  
Of honey that they've gathered they adore.

Their lives will at the most span seven years,  
And yet their deathless lineage perseveres;  
Not Egypt, Parthia or the Lydian race  
Nor those who dwell in Median regions grace 250

Their leaders more: the monarch safe, the breed  
Of bees is of one mind but pays no heed  
To unity should he die – they devastate  
Their gathered honey-store and mutilate  
Their own comb's waxen trellis: he's the lord  
Of all their labour – to him they afford  
Their reverence, and so around their king  
They all convene, frequently shouldering  
Him high as they protect him from the fray,  
Seeking a glorious death. Some people say 260

That bees indeed have been vouchsafed a share  
Of holy intellect and drink the air  
That God drinks, for he's everywhere – on earth,  
In Heaven and the ocean, and their birth  
All living creatures owe to him, at last  
Returning to him once their lives have passed .

Death cannot find a place for them, so they  
Soar up alive among the stars and stay  
In Heaven. To unseal their noble store  
Of honey, you must moisten it before 270

Applying smoke to it. Twice in one year  
Their store is gathered – when there should appear  
Lovely Taygete of the Pleiades  
As she spurns with her foot the ranging seas,  
And, secondly, when she begins to flee

The Fish and dips into the wintry sea.  
The anger of the bees is limitless,  
And, should an injury cause them distress,  
They suck in venom, leaving in the vein  
The hidden lances, thereby through their pain                    280  
Relinquishing their lives. But if you dread  
A freezing winter and the time ahead  
Would temper, pitying their wretched state,  
You must not fear with thyme to fumigate  
Or lop the empty wax. For frequently  
Into the comb the newt's gnawed craftily  
And beetles, loathing light, have crammed their bed,  
And he who feasts at someone else's spread,  
The drone, or he who swoops improperly  
Upon a less powerful enemy,    290  
The cruel hornet, or the fell moth or  
The spider, who Minerva's malice bore  
And hangs about the entrance with her net:  
The more impoverished the tenants get,  
The more their eagerness to remedy  
The fate that's fallen on their family,  
To fill their cells and wreath their granaries  
With flowers. Since ills fall even on bees,  
If they're sick with disease, you'll recognize  
The signs at once, for right before your eyes                    300  
A change of hue and a grim meagerness  
Appears. Bearing the lifeless, they progress  
Out of their cells in sadness. All about  
The door they linger or won't venture out,

Listless with dearth, with icy coldness numb;  
Then is a deep note heard, a long-drawn hum,  
As when the chill South Wind sighs through the trees  
And booming sounds come from the troubled seas  
As back they billow or a ravening tide  
Of fire surges up, shut fast inside 310  
The furnace-walls. Then I suggest that you  
Burn galbanum, and, when the honey through  
The reed troughs streams, instilled, their appetite  
Encourage, urging them to take a bite  
Of food they know well. It is good that you  
Blend oak-apples with dry rose petals, too,  
And briskly boil down new, full-bodied wine  
Or dried grapes grown upon a Parthian vine  
And centaury with its acerbic smell  
And that Cecropian thyme that all know well. 320  
There is a flower, easy to be found,  
Called star-wort by the rustics: in the ground  
It rears itself from just one sod and grows  
With many leaves, all golden, and it glows  
Across the violet gloom with purple hue,  
And frequently our shrines receive their due  
Decked with its woven wreaths; it's bitter, though,  
When put into one's mouth. The shepherds go  
To valleys that are grazed so that they may  
Collect it, near where Mella's streamlets stray. 330  
The roots of this, well-boiled in fragrant wine,  
Place at their doors, in hopes that they will dine  
On it, in baskets. But if at one blow

One's stock should fail him, it is time to show  
The monumental mystery to you  
That will allow the race to breed anew,  
Which Aristaeus, he of Arcady,  
Once famously invented – it was he  
Who in the past took the adulterated  
Blood of dead bullocks and thus generated 340  
A race of bees. This tangled tale I'll tell  
In full. For where those happy people dwell,  
Canopus, near the teeming Nile, and scud  
In painted rowing-boats upon the flood,  
While they're oppressed by nearby Persian foes,  
And where the river splits, as on it flows,  
In seven mouths from Ethiopian land,  
Enriching verdant Egypt with a band  
Of silt, they all adopt this stratagem.  
They choose a place that's small enough for them, 350  
Then tiles on top and clinging walls they place  
And add four slanting window-lights that face  
Each wind, the east, the west, the south, the north,  
Then seek a bullock, horns just jutting forth,  
A two-year-old, and then its breath they stay  
Despite its desperate struggles, and then they  
Beat it to death. Although they leave its hide  
Intact, its flesh is battered, and inside  
The doors it's left. Then they strew rosemary  
And thyme and broken branches liberally 360  
Beneath the creature's ribs. This first is done  
When the west winds enjoin the streams to run,



Before the meadows blush with tints anew  
 And twittering swallows house their younglings, too.  
 Meanwhile, within its softened bones the juice  
 Heats and ferments and thereby will produce  
 Amazing things, footless at first although  
 They'll soon have feet *and* wings, when they will go  
 About, swarming and buzzing here and there;  
 A wondrous sight, they occupy the air 370  
 Till from the summer-clouds they burst forth – they  
 Appear like Parthians urging on the fray  
 With darts. Muses, what god produced this art  
 For us? How did this new procedure start?  
 The shepherd Aristaeus lost his bees,  
 So goes the tale, from hunger and disease  
 And left Tempe and, sadly lingering by  
 Peneus's sacred source, he gave a cry  
 And called out to his mother. This he said:  
 “Cyrene, who dwell on this river's bed, 380  
 Why did you bear me of a noble breed  
 (If, as you say, Apollo is indeed  
 My father)? Mine's a cruel destiny.  
 Wherefore, then, has your love abandoned me?  
 Why did you bid me hope for Heaven? The peak  
 Of my poor mortal life I aimed to seek  
 In field and fold with all my careful skill,  
 But now I find it's caused me nought but ill.  
 Although you call me son, arise! Uproot  
 With your own hands the trees that bear my fruit! 390  
 Within the stalls upon the fire throw

Them all! Destroy my meadows' produce! Go  
 And burn my infant plants! My vines, too, hack,  
 If for my fame your loathing is so black!"  
 Down in the river's depths she heard a cry;  
 Her nymphs were carding fleeces with a dye  
 Of glass-green colour, Ligea, Drymo,  
 Phyllodoce beside them, and Xantho,  
 Their glossy locks on snowy necks so fair,  
 Cydippe and Lycorias, whose hair 400  
 Was yellow, one a maid, the other who  
 Had newly given birth, and Clio, too,  
 Who sat beside her sister Beroe,  
 The two of them begotten by the sea,  
 Wearing their dappled skins and beautified  
 With ornaments of gold, and at their side  
 Deiopeia and Ophis and Ephyre  
 And Arethusa, arrows finally  
 Set to one side, and Clymene, meanwhile,  
 Uttered the tale of Mars's sugared guile 410  
 In his seduction, and from days of old  
 Of love-affairs of all the gods she told,  
 While on their woolly tasks they worked away,  
 His mother captivated by each lay:  
 She heard the mournful grievance of her son  
 And great astonishment held everyone  
 Upon their glossy thrones. Arethusa, though,  
 Was first to surface from the depths below,  
 Her golden tresses shining. Far away  
 She called, "Cyrene, sister, your dismay 420

Is not for nothing, hearing such a groan -  
It's Aristaeus, your heart's very own,  
Hard by the river Peneus, woebegone  
And weeping, and it's you he's calling on."  
To her the mother, strangely terrified,  
Called out, "Conduct him hither to my side -  
Even the threshold of the gods he may  
Direct his feet." She found him a pathway  
By ordering the flood to open wide,  
And thus he was enveloped by the tide, 430  
Which rose up like a mountain, and he sped,  
Thus held in welcome, to the river-bed.  
Upon his mother's watery realm he gazed,  
At all the cave's imprisoned pools amazed,  
As by the echoing thickets he was met,  
Struck dumb by the tremendous pirouette  
Of waters that glide round the mighty earth,  
Phasis, Lycus and that spring that gave birth  
To the Enipeus, Father Tiber and  
The Anio that floods the Italian land, 440  
And roaring Hypanis which, thunderous,  
Speeds through the rocks, and Mysian Caicus  
And Eridanus, gold horns on his head,  
Than whom no other river ever sped  
So forcefully into the purple sea  
Beyond the laughing plains. As soon as he  
Came to the chamber's hanging roof of stone  
And from his mouth she heard an idle groan,  
Her sisters brought him water from the spring

With which to wash his hands, then furnishing 450

Him with smooth towels; some of them prepared

A feast with brimming cups; the altars flared

With incense. "Take a cup of wine," said she,

"Which came from a Maeonian winery,

To honour Ocean." After that, she prayed

To Ocean, by whom everything was made,

And to her nymphs who keep secure five score

Forests and five score streams. And, furthermore,

She sprinkled nectar thrice upon the fire,

And thrice the flame flared, shooting ever higher 460

Until it reached the roof. At this she grew

Braver, then said, "There is a prophet who

Goes by the name of Proteus: it is he

Who in a chariot roams the Carpathian Sea,

Drawn by two-footed steeds and fish, He's gone

To his Pallene, there to look upon

The ports of Thessaly. Him we revere,

And aged Nereus, too, because the seer

Knows everything – what is and what has been

And what is yet to come - since it is seen 470

By King Neptune, who grazes in the main

Sea-cows and ugly seals. First, you must chain

Proteus, dear son, so that he may outline

The cause of the affliction and define

A cure, for no precepts will he impart

Except by force, nor will you move his heart

By prayer. Only with force and fetters he

Will see defeat despite his trickery.

At blazing noon, when all the grass is dry  
 And shade allures the herd of cattle, I 480  
 Will guide you to the old man's haunt, where he  
 Takes himself off when weary of the sea,  
 Where you may catch him sleeping. Grip him tight!  
 Then you'll be faced with many a monstrous sight,  
 For he will change into a fell tigress  
 Or boar or snake or tawny lioness  
 Or like a fire emit a crackling sound  
 And thus the chains with which he had been bound  
 He'll shake off or, like water, deliquesce.  
 The more, though, that he shifts his limitless 490  
 Transfigurements, the more effectually  
 Cling to the bands that bind him until he  
 Resumes his former shape!" That's what she said  
 To her dear son; then she began to shed  
 Ambrosial odour, and throughout his frame  
 And trim-combed locks he was steeped with that same  
 Perfume, and in him some small vigour leapt.  
 A spacious cavern stands on the windswept  
 Mountain upon which many billows break  
 Into secluded recesses, which make 500  
 Harbours for heedless sailors. That is where  
 Perseus crouched, hidden by a large rock: there  
 She placed the young man, hidden from the light,  
 And, veiled in mist, she stood far from his sight.  
 The thirsty Indians now felt the heat  
 Of Sirius, the sun's course half-complete.  
 The blades were parched, each river's muddy bed

Baked by the scorching shafts of light being shed  
From Heaven, when Proteus, coming from the tide,  
Sought his accustomed cave, while far and wide 510

The watery folk who people the waste sea  
Sprinkled the bitter brine-dew liberally.

The seals slept here and there along the shore;  
Proteus himself sat at their very core

Upon a rock, just as a shepherd will  
Sometimes to guard his flock upon a hill.

When Vesper brings the lambs back to the stall,  
Whose bleating is an optimistic call

To wolves, while they are counted. Instantly  
The youth gave the old man no chance to be 520

Settled but rushed at him without delay,  
Yelling, and fettered him as there he lay.

The seer recalled his magic, altering  
His human form to every wondrous thing -  
Beasts, fires, streams – but when no trickery  
Was able to allow him to get free,

Defeated, he once more became the seer  
Proteus. “Boldest of youths, who sent you here?”

He said with human voice, “And why?” But he  
Replied, “You know well – here's no treachery. 530

So cease all this! I'm here at Heaven's behest,  
And I am here to make you a request

In my misfortune.” Thus intimidated,  
The seer a grey light which illuminated

His eyes shot forth, gnashing his teeth. Then he  
Began to speak of Heaven's destiny:

"It's heavenly anger that harasses you,  
 And for a heavy crime you pay your due.  
 It's Orpheus who imposed this penalty  
 On you, should Fate agree, for frantically 540  
 He grieves for his lost wife. Poor girl, she sped  
 Along the stream that she might stay ahead  
 Of you. There was upon the riverside  
 A fierce snake, but she did not see it glide  
 Before her feet. But when she died, her band  
 Of fellow-dryads, wailing, took their stand  
 Upon the mountains' highest peaks, and she  
 Was mourned upon the heights of Rhodope,  
 Pangaia and the land of Rhesus (for  
 That land was favoured by the god of war); 550  
 The Getae country and the Hebrus' stream  
 And Orithyia all took up the theme.  
 And Orpheus with his lute eased his distress  
 For his sweet consort in his loneliness  
 Upon the shoreline at the break of day,  
 And when it died he still sang out his lay,  
 And even to the jaws of Taenarus  
 He came and the infernal Erebus  
 With its grim palace and the groves that ring  
 With horror of the darkness. There the king 560  
 Of terrors and the Manes, whom no plea  
 Can tame, he met. In the profundity  
 Of Hell, the hollow shades came trooping out,  
 Charmed by his song, mere semblances without  
 Brightness, as many as the birds that hide

Among the greenery when eventide  
Or wintry rainfalls drive them from the heights -  
Wives, husbands, heroes finished with their fights,  
Boys, maids, youths burnt before their fathers. Round  
Them all, black slime and hideous weeds abound,       570  
Round Cocytus, that vile marsh which contains  
Dead waters, and the Styx with its nine drains,  
And Tartarus itself stood goggling,  
The Furies, too, serpents encircling  
Their brows, and Cerberus, jaws open wide  
In wonder, and the very wind had died  
And Ixion's wheel stood still. Now scathlessly  
He'd passed all perils, and Eurydice  
Had gained the upper air, restored indeed  
At last, but, as Proserpina decreed,                       580  
A mad desire surprised him suddenly,  
A fault that would be pardoned easily  
Should Hell agree: he, at the very brink  
Of day, allowed himself no time to think.  
He turned and looked at her, his own once more.,  
And all the labour that he'd spent before  
To rescue her was wasted, and the pact  
He'd made with that fell tyrant now was cracked.  
And then three times a crash was heard beside  
The waters of Avernus, and she cried,                       590  
"What madness has destroyed both me and you,  
Orpheus? The Fates enforce my last adieu,  
My swimming eyes deprived now of their sight.  
I'm carried off, enclosed by ponderous night.



Alas, though I stretch out my hands to you,  
There's nothing that these helpless hands can do."

And then, like smoke dissolving in the air,  
She vanished from his sight and left him there;

He clutched at empty shadows, desperately

Yearning to speak to her again, but she 600

Was gone from him; Charon would not allow

His crossing Styx again. What to do now?

Where to direct his footsteps, once more made

Bereft? Will he be able to persuade

The Muses with his tears? How, equally,

Can he address the powers of darkness? She

Herself was even now, while deathly cold,

Upon the Stygian boat. It has been told

That, seven months increasingly, alone,

Beneath a cliff, by desolate Strymon 610

He melted tigers' hearts as all along

He gathered up the oak-trees with his song,

As in a poplar's shade a nightingale

Mourns her lost young with a melodious wail,

Which some relentless husbandman has spied

Within her nest and wrested from her side,

Unfledged, and wails all night, perched on a spray,

Piping insistently her dolorous lay

And fills the region with the wrong she bore.

For in his heart he had no yearning for 620

A new love. For by Tanais, bound with snow,

Fields ever wed to Thracian frosts, he'd go

Alone, mourning his lost Eurydice,

A promise unfulfilled. Subsequently,  
The Thracian women, by this tribute spurned,  
In awful Bacchic rituals reeled and turned  
And tore him limb from limb while revelling  
At dead midnight, thereafter scattering  
The fragments through the fields hither and yon.  
And when Oeagrian Hebrus thundered on, 630  
From off his marble neck they tore his head  
And carried it mid-river, where it said  
With cold tongue and faint breath, 'Eurydice!  
Ah, poor Eurydice! Ah, misery!  
Along the riverbanks the voice resounded."  
So Proteus spoke these words, and then he bounded  
Into the deep, engulfed with foam below  
The whirling vortex. Not Cyrene, though:  
Unasked, she to the startled youth said, "Son,  
Forget these sorrows, for this is the one 640  
Sole reason that's behind this whole disease,  
Because those nymphs sent ruin to your bees,  
The nymphs with whom wretched Eurydice  
Cavorted in the yawning greenery.  
Be suppliant and offer gifts! Ask grace!  
Worship the gentle maidens of that place!  
They'll pardon you; their anger they'll abate.  
The mode of worship I'll delineate:  
Choose four impressive bulls now pasturing 650  
On the Lycaean heights, then settling  
On just as many cows who never knew  
The yoke, then by the lofty altars you

Must build four more and from their gullets drain  
The sacred blood, then, once they have been slain,  
Have them all in a leafy woodland laid,  
And then, after the ninth dawn has displayed  
Its beams, send to Orpheus his funeral dues,  
The poppies of Lethe; then you must choose  
A coal-black sheep to slay, then seek once more  
The grove – once she is pardoned, then adore                   660  
Eurydice, the sheep then slain.” Without  
Delay he set about to carry out  
His mother's bidding: to the shrines he went  
And raised the altars, as he had been sent  
To do; the bulls of peerless form and size  
And cows to match, who'd never set their eyes  
Upon a yoke he thither led, and when  
The ninth dawn ushered in the day, she then  
Sent to Orpheus his dues and presently  
Went to the grove once more. But suddenly                   670  
A strange and wondrous portent they espied,  
For there appeared out of each broken hide,  
Among the melting flesh, a swarm of bees  
That trailed and flowed together in the trees,  
Upon the hanging branches clustering.  
Of fields and flocks and trees you've hear me sing  
While Caesar in all hi of his majesty  
By deep Euphrates trounced the enemy,  
Our willing allies now, and heavenly fame  
Achieved. And it was I, Virgil by name,                   680  
Nursed by Parthenope, longing to be

A man of undisturbed tranquillity,  
Sang rustic songs that I might gratify  
The men who guard their flocks, and once, when I  
Possessed a young man's pluck, for you I made  
Sngs, Tityrus, beneath a beech-tree's shade.



