

Versions of the Text of Lucretius - 1743 Daniel Browne Edition - Unknown Translator

Post by "Cassius" of May 21, 2018 at 5:18 PM

Opening of Lucretius Book 1, from 1743 Edition of unknown author. Everyone has their own taste in writing style, but I've always found this opening one of the most difficult-to-read passages. If the rest of the book lives up to the standard set here, this might be one of the most understandable English versions available. Two takeaways: (1) If this translator is correct, "Venus" is pretty clearly not identical with "Nature." Whatever we conclude Lucretius considered Venus to be, whether it is "pleasure" or some other "force," it probably isn't a simple personification of Nature. (2) There's still significant interpretation going on, for example in the last sentence quoted here, does "Caelo" mean "sky," or "heavens," or can it mean "Gods"?

MOTHER of Rome, Delight of Men and Gods, Sweet Venus; who with vital Power dost fill the Sea bearing the Ships, the fruitful Earth, all Things beneath the rolling Signs of Heaven; for 'tis by Thee Creatures of every kind conceive, rise into Life, and view the Sun's bright Beams. Thee Goddess, Thee the Winds avoid; the Clouds fly Thee, and thy Approach; with various Art the Earth for Thee affords her sweetest Flowers; for Thee the Sea's rough Waves put on their Smiles, and the smooth Sky shines with diffused Light. For when the buxom Spring leads on the Year, and genial Gales of Western Winds blow fresh, unlock'd from Winter's Cold, the airy Birds first feel Thee Goddess, and express thy Power; thy active Flame strikes though their very Souls. And then the savage Beasts, with wanton Play, frisk o'er the cheerful Fields, and swim the rapid Streams. So pleased with thy Sweetness, so transported by thy soft Charms, all living Nature strives, with sharp Desire, to follow thee her Guide, where Thou art pleas'd to lead. In short, thy Power inspiring every Breast with tender Love, drives every Creature on with eager Heat, in Seas, in Mountains, and in swiftest Floods, in leafy Forests, and in verdant Plains, to propagate their Kind from Age to Age.

Since Thou alone dost govern Nature's Laws, and nothing without Thee can rise to Light, without Thee nothing can look gay or lovely; I beg Thee a Companion to my Lays, which, now I sing of Nature, I devote to my dear Memmius, whom Thou art ever pleased, sweet Goddess, to adorn with every Grace; for him, kind Deity, inspire my song, and give immortal Beauty to my Verse. Mean time, the bloody Tumults of the War by Sea and Land compose, and lay asleep. For Thou alone Mankind with quiet Peace canst bless; because 'tis Mars Armipotent that rules the bloody Tumults of the War, and He by everlasting Pains of Love bound fast, tastes in thy Lap most sweet Repose, turns back his smooth long Neck, and views thy Charms, and greedily sucks Love at both his Eyes. Supinely as he rests his very Soul hangs on thy Lips; this God dissolv'd in Ease, in the soft Moments when thy heavenly Limbs cling round him, melting with Eloquence caress, great Goddess, and implore a Peace for Rome.

For neither can I write with chearful Strains, in Times so sad, nor can the noble House of Memmius desert the common Good in such Distress of Things. The Hours you spare apply with close Attention to my Verse, and free from Care receive true Reason's Rules; nor these my Gifts, prepared with faithful Pains, reject with Scorn before they are understood. For I begin to write of lofty Themes, of Gods, and of the Motions of the Sky, the Rise of Things, how all Things Nature forms, and how they grow, and to Perfection rise, and into what, by the same Nature's Laws, those Things resolve and die; which as I write I call by various Names; sometimes 'tis Matter, or the first Principles or Seeds of Things, or first of Bodies, whence all else proceed.

For the whole Nature of the Gods must spend an Immortality in softest Peace, removed from our Affairs, and separated by Distance infinite; from Sorrow free; secure from Danger; in its own Happiness sufficient, and nought of ours can want, is neither pleased with Good, nor vexed with Ill.

Indeed Mankind, in wretched Bondage held, lay groveling on the ground, galled with the Yoke of what is called Religion; from the Sky this Tyrant shewed her Head, and with grim Looks hung over us poor Mortals here below; until a Man of Greece with steady Eyes dared look her in the Face, and first opposed her Power. Him not the Fame of Gods nor Thunder's Roar kept back, nor threatening Tumults of the Sky; but still the more they roused the active Virtue of his aspiring Soul, as he pressed forward first to break thro' Natures scanty Bounds. His Mind's quick Force prevailed; and so he passed by far the flaming Limits of this World, and wander'd with his comprehensive Soul o'er all the mighty Space; from thence returned triumphant; told us what Things may have a Being, and what cannot; and how a finite Power is fixed to each; a Bound it cannot break; and so Religion, which we feared before, by him subdued, we tread upon in turn; his Conquest makes us equal to the Gods.