1. The notion of retreat
   1. Vergil, *Georgics* 2.483-6: sin, has ne possim naturae accedere pratis

frigidus obstiterit circum praecordia sanguis,

rura mihi et rigui placeant in uallibus amnes,

flumina amem siluasque inglorius.

But if the child blood about my heart bar me from reaching those realms of nature, let my delight be the country, and the running streams amid the dells- may I love the waters and the woods, though I be unknown to fame.[[1]](#footnote-1)

* 1. *Georgics*, 4.563-4: illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat

Parthenope, studiis florentem ignobilis oti.

In those days I, Virgil, was nursed by sweet Parthenope, and rejoiced in the arts of inglorious ease.

* 1. Lucretius*, De Rerum Natura* 5.1127-8: ut satius multo iam sit parere quietum

quam regere imperio res uelle et regna tenere.

So that it is indeed much better to obey in peace than to desire to hold the world in fee and to rule kingdoms.

1. Acorns and nature as a rule
   1. *DRN* 5.939-40: glandiferas inter curabant corpora quercus | plerumque;

Amidst the oak-laden acorns they refreshed themselves for the most part.

* 1. *DRN* 5.963-5: conciliabat enim uel mutual quamque cupido

uel uiolenta uiri uis atque inpensa libido

uel pretium, glandes atque arbita uel pira lecta.

For either the woman was attracted by mutural desire, or caught by the man’s violent force, and vehement lust, or by a bribe – acorns and arbute-berries or choice pears.

* 1. *DRN* 5.1416-17: sic odium coepit glandis, sic illa relicta

strata cubilia sunt herbis et frondibus aucta.

So men grew tired of acorns, so we deserted those old beds strewn with herbage and leaves piled up.

* 1. *G*. 1.158-9: heu magnum alterius frustra spectabis aceruum

concussaque famem in siluis solabere quercu.

In vain, poor man, you will gaze on your neighbor’s large store of grain, and you will be shaking oaks in the woods to assuage your hunger.

1. Science and life
   1. *G*. 2.475-82: Me uero primum dulces ante omnia Musae,

quarum sacra fero ingeti percussus amore,

accipiant caelique uias et sidera monstrent,

defectus solis uarios lunaeque labors;

unde tremor terries, qua ui maria alta tumescent

obicibus ruptis rursusque in se ipsa residant,

quid tantum Ocean properent se tinguere soles

hiberni, uel quae tardis mora noctibus obstet.

But as for me – first may the Muses, sweet beyond compare, whose hold emblems, under the spell of a mighty love, I bear, take me to themselves, and show me heavens pathways, the stars, the sun’s many eclipses, the moon’s many labours; whence come tremblings of the earth, the force to make deep seas swell and burst their barriers, then sink back upon themselves; why winter suns hasten so fast to dip in Ocean, or why delays clog the laggard nights.

* 1. *DRN* 5.751: solis item quoque defectus lunaeque latebras…

Eclipses of the sun and also hidings of the moon.

* 1. *G*. 490-3: Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas,

atque metus omnis et inexorabile fatum

suiecit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis auari.

fortunatus et ille, deos qui nouit agrestis.

Blessed is he who has succeeded in learning the laws of nature’s working, has cast beneath his feet all fear of fate’s implacable decree, and the how of insatiable Death. But happy, too, is he who knows the rural gods.

* 1. *DRN* 3.1071-5: quam bene si uideat, iam rebus quisque relictis

naturam primum studeat cognoscere rerum,

temporis aeterni quoniam, non unius horae,

ambigitur status, in quo sit mortalibus omnis

aetas, post mortem quae restat cumque, manenda.

For could he see that well, at once each would throw his business aside and first study the to learn that nature of things, since the matter in doubt is not his state for one hour, but for eternity, in what state mortals must expect all time to be passed which remains after death.

1. Hot blood (see also 1a above): Horace, *Ars Poetica* 464-4: deus immortalis haberi

dum cupit Empedocles, adreneem frigidus Aetnam | insiluit.

Empedocles, eager to be thought a god immortal, coolly leapt into burning Aetna.[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. Virgil, Caesar, and the limits of action and thought
   1. *G*. 4.252-3: tristi languebunt corpora morbo –

quod iam non dubiis poteris cognoscere signis.

Their bodies will droop with grievous disease – and this you can at once discern by no uncertain signs.

* 1. *G*. 1.1-5: Quid faciat laetas segetes, quo sidere terram

uertere, Maecenas, ulmisque adiungere uites

conueniat, quae cura boum, qui cultus habendo

sit pecori, apibus quanta experiential parcis,

hinc canere incipiam.

What makes crops joyous, beneath what star, Maecenas, it is well to turn the soil, and wed vines to elms, what tending the cattle need, what care the herd in breeding, what skill the thrifty bees – hence shall I being my song.

* 1. *G*. 1.24-40: tuque adeo, quem mox quae sint habitura deorum,

concilia incertum est, urbesne inuisere, Caesar,

terrarumque uelis curam, et te maximus orbis

auctorem frugum tempetatumque potentem

accipiat, cingens materna tempora myrto;

an deus immensi uenias maris ac tua nautae

numina sola colant, tibi seruiat ultima Thule,

teque sibi generum Tethys emat omnibus undis;

anne nouum tardis sidus te mensibus addas,

qua locus Erigonen inter Chelasque sequentis

panditur (ipse tibi iam bracchi contrahit ardens

Scorpios et caeli iusta plus parte reliquit):

quidquid eris (nam te nec spirant Tartara regem

nec tibi regnandi ueniat tam dira cupido,

quamuis Elysios miretur Graecia campos

nec repetita sequi curet Proserpina matrem),

da facilem cursum atque audacibus adnue coeptis.

And you above all, Caesar, whom we know not what company of the gods shall claim ere long; whether you choose to watch over cities and care for our lands, that so the great globe may receive you as the giver of increase and lord of the seasons, wreathing your brows with your mother’s myrtle; whether you come as god of the boundless sea and sailors worship your deity alone, while farthest Thule owns your lordship and Tethys with the dowry of all her waves buys you to wed her daughter; or whether you add yourself as a new star to the lingering months, where, between the Virgin and the grasping Claws, a space is opening up (lo! for you even now the blazing Scorpion draws in his arms, and has left more than a due portion of heaven!) – whatever you are to be (for Tartarus hopes not for you as king, and may such monstrous lust of empire never seize you, though Greece is enchanted by the Elysian fields, and Proserpine reclaimed cares not to follow her mother), grant me a calm voyage, give assent to my bold emprise.

* 1. *G*. 4.559-62: Haec super aruorum cultu percorumque canebam

et super arboribus, Caesar dum magnus ad altum

fulminat Euphraten bello uictorque uolentis

per populous dat iura uiamque adfectat Olympo.

So much I sang in addition to the care of fields of cattle, and of trees, while great Caesar thundered in war by deep Euphrates and bestowed a victor’s laws on willing nations, and essayed the path to Heaven.

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1. All texts and translations from the Loeb Classical Library. Virgil tr. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold, 1999. Lucretius tr. W. H. D. Rouse, rev. Martin Ferguson Smith, 1982. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tr. Fairclough, 1920. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)