Preface

This is a poem about language. Language, of course, is an important part of classical studies. The title, S.O.V., refers to one of the most common sentence structures in Latin: subject-object-verb. English speakers have less freedom in regard to word placement. This poem mimics the Latin form in English. This is also a poem about the fallibility of language. The act of speaking requires the speaker to put abstract thoughts to language. Much is lost in translation. Just as we must often make do with corrupted classical texts, each of us must develop the skill of understanding each other.

S.O.V.

Every mind a monk,
Drowsy, and full of drink,
Counting declensions on his fingers, is.

“I you see,
atque,
I you love, loved, have been loving.”

Each mind, with all its rough literalism, misses
The pint, and often a word or two.

“You beautiful am, are, is, was, were, had been.”
(We bound by more than syntax am, are, were being.)

Every word a corrupt translation,
Of a language without vocabulary, sine,  
Singed at the edges, or forgotten  
Under a wine vat, is.

(Well-meaning nor Wheelock will help you now.)

“Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man;  
but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a  
man,”  
is an old favorite of jotting scribes.  
But the words aren’t the problem-only that they cometh  
out.

Words to the opening of the great dripping cave arrive  
Where in white marble is carved:  
"Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate"

(“Abandon all hope, ye who enter here”)  
Which they may hurriedly read before being jettisoned,  
And immediately upon meeting air beginning to  
de decompose  
As all things exposed to light and oxygen will.

Here is your subject,  
Here is your object;  
Now, do.