

# Poetic differences between Leonard and Humphries translations (opening verse of book 1)

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 20, 2024 at 2:48 PM

[Bryan](#) just posted (over in the thread ["On Nature, Book 28"](#)) that "Epicurus and Metrodorus originally took a fully conventionalist view of language".

That got me thinking about how different translations of Lucretius, and how words influence feelings and poetic words can push a feeling response.

Here is a side-by-side comparison of the opening of Book 1, between Leonard and Humphries, and you can see that there are very different poetic flourishes in each one (and which that makes me wonder about what the original Latin is actually like).

Leonard says: "the first fowls of the air, smit to the heart by thee foretoken thy approach"

Humphries says: "high in the sky the happy-hearted birds, responsive to your coming, call and cry"

## **Leonard:**

For thee the daedal Earth bears scented flowers,  
For thee waters of the unvexed deep  
Smile, and the hollows of the serene sky  
Glow with diffused radiance for thee!  
For soon as comes the springtime face of day,  
And procreant gales blow from the West unbarred,  
First fowls of air, smit to the heart by thee,  
Foretoken thy approach, O thou Divine,

## **Humphries:**

For you that sweet artificer, the earth,  
Submits her flowers, and for you the deep  
Of ocean smiles, and the calm heaven shines  
With shoreless light.  
Ah, goddess, when the spring  
Makes clear its daytime, and a warmer wind  
Stirs from the west, a procreative air,  
High in the sky the happy-hearted birds,  
Responsive to your coming, call and cry,

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## Post by “Bryan” of March 20, 2024 at 3:03 PM

Here is my working translation of that bit (the subjects are capitalized).

"for you the crafty Earth sends up  
sweet flowers- for you the Surfaces of the sea sparkle-  
and the calmed Sky shines with spread out light.  
just as the springtime Appearance of the day is revealed  
and, once set free, the productive Air of the west-wind is lively:  
first the Birds of the air signify you, goddess, and your  
arrival, overwhelmed in their hearts with your power."

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## Post by “Cassius” of March 20, 2024 at 3:25 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

(and which that makes me wonder about what the original Latin is actually like).

Which is why, although I am partial in favor of Humphries because I think his style fits very well, for most important uses I skip over all the poetic versions and go right to Munro or Bailey or 1743 or Martin Ferguson Smith to get the most literal possible translation.

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## Post by “Pacatus” of March 20, 2024 at 3:49 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

for most important uses I skip over all the poetic versions



Actually, I don't really disagree even though I prefer the poetic versions, and have used both A.E. Stallings (though at times I find her rhymed fourteeners cumbersome) and Frank O. Copley's blank verse version. After all, Lucretius had his own poetic flourishes. But for clarity, I'll refer to Martin Ferguson Smith.