

# Preparing A Public Domain Audio And Text Version Lucretius In Modern American English

Post by "Cassius" of October 16, 2025 at 2:42 PM

The title of the post states the goal: I want a freely accessible good quality audio version of Lucretius rendered into modern American English based on the best translations currently available. This goal is going to take quite a while to accomplish and it will require several steps:

1. We need a text that has been prepared from the best public domain versions available, "conformed" into a mashup-edition that avoids archaic or over-academic constructions but still highly accurate and as literal as possible. That will require the version be in prose rather than poetry.
2. We already have three side-by side public domain translations that can be used to compile a revised version. They can be viewed [here on the web](#).
3. I created [a Google Doc](#) with the Bailey edition as a base and we can use that to make changes based on better word choice in the other editions. As set up now anyone can view the latest version at that link. I will grant commenting permission to anyone here on the forum who asks, and I will appreciate as many people as possible making editing comments. We can discuss those proposed changes in the comments and I will then incorporate into the body of the text. At regular intervals I will export to markdown and we'll add this version back to [the side-by-side page](#) where it can be selected or deselected along with the other three translations.
4. After we have an improved text we will want to create a text-to-speech version and export to MP3 where we can make this publicly available for download. In order to accomplish that we'll need to do the following:
5. Find an affordable AI text-to-speech generator with a very professional voice. I suspect we want standard Mid-West style accent that is serious but not overly dramatic. I'm forever indebted to the Charlton Griffin version available at Audible.com, but I find it overly dramatic and even pompous in tone at places, and I don't think that's the right tone. The most widely useful version would likely not sound like Biblical/Apocalyptic tone, or even "Thus Spake Zarathustra, but rather serious and insistent without sounding like an eccentric fanatic.

Steps where you can help:

1. Keep prompting us to move this forward when things seem to slow down for a period of time.
2. Make suggestions for consolidating better language from other translations to substitute for issue with the Bailey version.

3. Make suggestions for AI text-to-speech generation. That includes going through the many website offerings to find the best mix of affordable (preferably free, but at last reasonable cost) that will produce output recordable and usable in the public-domain. This will also likely mean generating a "prompt" that will give instruction as to the way the voice should read the text. For example as a start
  1. "Render the following text in a very professional voice with Mid-West American accent that is serious but not overly dramatic. The voice should never be pompous or fanatical but rather serious and insistent while always being friendly."

Comments and suggestions for how to proceed are welcome. I am sure there are versions already available, and there will be more in the future, but I'd like to see one that will forever be public domain, and is based on a revised and "conformed" copy of the best texts, and that won't happen anywhere else but here.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of October 16, 2025 at 2:55 PM**

If you are aware of particularly problematic sections of Lucretius where some translations seem better than others, please point them out. Here's one example:

At Book 1:449, Bailey renders "eventum" as "accidents," which I think is exactly the wrong implication in modern American English. "Accident" today has more of a meaning of "chaotic" or "truly accidental," and implies that any particular moment anything can happen. The real sense seems to me to be rather that what happens is simply "without intention," but in fact what does happen is not chaotic or "accidental" at all, but in fact a necessary result of the properties of the atoms as they move through the void. Rather than "accidental," most things are in fact closer to be "determined" rather being the result of a universe in which "anything" can happen.

Dunster does better by leaving the main word as "event" rather than introducing "accident." "Event" is a more neutral term in English that just conveys "it happens" rather than implying that things happen chaotically. So in this section I'll make the "modern American version" follow Dunster rather than Bailey:

[Lucretius Side-by-Side](#)

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### **Post by "Cassius" of October 16, 2025 at 3:03 PM**

Another rendering by Bailey that has always bothered me is this one at [Book 2:37](#):

*But if we see that these thoughts are mere mirth and mockery, and in very truth the fears of men and the cares that dog them fear not the clash of arms nor the weapons of war, but pass boldly among kings and lords of the world, nor dread the glitter that comes from gold nor the bright sheen of the purple robe, can you doubt that all such power belongs to reason alone, above all when the whole of life is but a struggle in darkness?*

I don't find this one as objectionable as my first example, but the phrase "belongs to reason alone" is easy to misinterpret if someone isn't aware of Epicurus' views on logic and the priority of the senses, and "*when the whole of life is but a struggle in darkness*" is easy to read in a negative way that Lucretius is implying that the whole of life IS and HAS TO REMAIN a struggle in darkness.

Munro does better with his "withal" to indicate that the whole of life does not have to be a struggle in the dark:

how can you doubt that this is wholly the prerogative of reason, *when the whole of life withal is a struggle in the dark?*

And Dunster doesn't make it so easy to misinterpret the Epicurean position on reason by saying "want of sense":

*Do you doubt but all this stuff is want of sense, and all our life is groping in the dark?*

So here I would combine Dunster and Munro to improve that final statement.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of October 16, 2025 at 3:07 PM**

There are no doubt many other examples where Bailey can be improved. We can't hope for perfection but before we invest a lot of effort in a text to speech version we might as well start with a version that doesn't perpetuate the worst of the possible poor word choices.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of October 16, 2025 at 3:24 PM**

Bailey uses lots of "whits" which are likely much better rendered in modern English as "bits."

Similarly, "needs be" is much better as "necessarily be" and "aught" is better as "anything"

Also:

forsooth -> indeed

perchance -> perhaps

thou and thee -> You

verily -> truly

must needs -> must necessarily