

# Lucretius - Essential and most important texts

Post by “Joshua” of January 27, 2020 at 10:24 AM

A little thought experiment for the day:

Suppose you were tasked with abridging *De Rerum Natura*; what criteria would you use to decide what gets left on the cutting floor?

Would you abridge based on the force and power of his poetry, and leave off some of the duller sections on heat and wind and magnets?

Would you select for the finest summary of Epicurean thought?

Would you opt for pith? Or for the choicest Latin? For the Synoptic view, and skip the details?

In another life I once loved the *Tao Te Ching*. I've heard it described as a book that can be read in an afternoon, or a lifetime. Could you cut Lucretius in such way that you have such a book, but without losing anything essential?

On a personal note, I generally dislike abridgments. I recall how crestfallen I was one high school summer when I had fought my way through *The Count of Monte Cristo*, only to discover after I read it that, in those lazy afternoons, I had been reading an abridged text.

But the question might give insight into how we all read the text in different ways. To paraphrase Stephen Greenblatt, books always run into the particular fissures of one's psychic life.