

HORACE ODES 1.24:

QUINTILIUS AND EPICUREANISM, PHILODEMUS AND VARIUS

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Summary: A number of Epicurean elements have been identified in *Odes* 1.24 by past scholarship. This paper begins by summarising them, before proposing two major additions, one a quotation from Philodemus *On Death*. A final section appends a speculation about another possible Epicurean source for the ode, Varius' *De Morte*.

Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus
tam cari capitis? praecipe lugubris
cantus, Melpomene, cui liquidam pater
vocem cum cithara dedit.

ergo Quintilium perpetuus sopor
urget; cui Pudor et Iustitiae soror
incorrupta Fides nudaque Veritas
quando ullum inveniet parem? 5

multis ille bonis flebilis occidit,
nulli flebilior quam tibi, Vergili.
tu frustra pius, heu, non ita creditum
poscis Quintilium deos. 10

quid? si Threicio blandius Orptheo
auditam moderere arboribus fidem,
num vanae redeat sanguis imagini,
quam virga semel horrida 15

non lenis precibus fata recludere
nigro compulerit Mercurius gregi?
durum: sed levius fit patientia
quidquid corrigere est nefas. 20

§I of the present paper assembles those Epicurean elements which have already been identified in *Odes* 1.24. §II adds two further such elements, viz. *pudor/Pudor* (§II.i), and a hitherto unrecognised quotation of Philodemus (§II.ii). §III considers other possible sources of the ode, especially Varius' *On Death*.

I. Identified Epicurean Elements in *Odes* 1.241

Odes 1.24 consoles Virgil for the death of Quintilius Varus.² Quintilius, a committed Epicurean, had, along with L. Varius Rufus, Plotius Tucca and Virgil, been a pupil of Philodemus in the 40s BC. The four men are addressed together in three of the treatises which were part of Philodemus' *Περὶ κακιῶν καὶ τῶν ἀντικειμένων ἀρετῶν* (*On Vices and their Opposing Virtues*), viz. *PHerc. Paris.* 2, col. Z.23-25 (*On Slander*), *PHerc.* 253, fr. 12.3-5 (*On Greed*), and *PHerc.* 1082, col. 11.2-4 (*On Flattery*).³ Philodemus always, so it seems, addressed them in the same way: ὦ Πλώτιε καὶ Οὐάριε καὶ Οὐεργίλιε καὶ Κοϊντίλιε.⁴ They are the 'dedicatees' of the works in which their names appear in that they constituted the small class of elite students⁵ who heard as lectures (at least) these three treatises of Philodemus which, as recorded by his stenographers and then corrected by the Master,⁶ contributed to his published *On Vices*.

Norman De Witt seems to have been the first scholar to note and discuss some of the Epicurean content of *Odes* 1.24.⁷ He identified *nudaque*

1 The bibliography on *Od.* 1.24 is extensive; in the present paper only items relevant to the ode's Epicurean content are cited.

2 On the epicedic/consolatory aspects of *Od.* 1.24 see Esteve-Forriol 1962: 27-31, 166 (*Stellenregister* s.v. *Horatius carm.* 1.24); Nisbet-Hubbard 1970: 280-81.

3 For the constituents of *On Vices and Opposing Virtues* see Capasso 2010.

4 See Puglia 2023.

5 On the group see Gigante 1993: 172-74; Sider 1997: 19-23.

6 For the transformation of lectures into books see Heath 2004: 255-76 (= Ch. 8 'Technology').

7 De Witt 1935: 314-15.

Veritas (7) and *corrigere* (20) as references to Epicurean *parrhesia* (frankness).⁸ In 1993 Marcello Gigante added that *Fides* (7) is an essential element of another major Epicurean aspiration, friendship,⁹ and he commented on *bonis* (9) as a term with Epicurean significance¹⁰ – see also below. More recently Philip Thibodeau has successfully attempted a fuller treatment of the ode in Epicurean terms.¹¹ He explored topoi drawn by Horace from Epicurean sources, viz.: 1) the endlessness and irreversibility of death; 2) the non-interference of the gods in human life; 3) the commercial metaphor of *non ita creditum* as a possible reflection of an Epicurean source (cf. Lucretius *DRN* 3.971); and 4) the need for Epicureans to avoid excessive lamentation for the dead and to show restraint in mourning.¹² More broadly, Thibodeau again related the overall frank and critical tone of Horace in *Odes* 1.24 to *parrhesia* among Epicurean friends – and specifically to Philodemus’ *On Frank Criticism*. Horace knew of its particular interest to the group of four to which Virgil and Quintilius belonged,¹³ and especially to Quintilius, to whom *parrhesia* was doubly germane: not only did he have a general reputation for speaking frankly, but he was famous for his candour in the field of literary criticism.¹⁴ Thibodeau also pointed out that Horace’s own stance in *Odes* 1.24 vis-à-vis Virgil is reminiscent of the way Quintilius behaved towards his Epicurean friends: “how better to advise Vergil to quit his mourning than with a style of *sermo* memorializing Quintilius’ own?” (252). Horace, so Thibodeau proposed, is also making the implicit point that, although Quintilius is dead, his style of frank but friendly criticism based on the teachings of Philodemus lives on. Two final implications of Thibodeau’s discussion, while not intrinsically implausible, are perhaps less relevant. They are first that Horace adopts the role of frank speaker with awareness that Philodemus had discriminated between, on the one hand, genuinely candid critics and, on the other, flatterers who employed illusory

8 On *corrigere* see also Putnam 1992–1993: 134.

9 Gigante 1993: 175; for *Pudor*, the third member of the personified trio, see below §II.i.

10 Gigante 1993: 171.

11 Thibodeau 2002–2003.

12 See also, for background, Hessler 2015.

13 Thibodeau 2002–2003: 250–51, citing Hor. *Sat.* 1.5.39–42, where Virgil, Varius, and Tucca are described as *candidi*.

14 See Muthmann 1967: 31; Thibodeau 2002–2003: 251, and below.

criticism to convey adulation, and second that Horace also had in mind that “Philodemus dedicated his *Peri Kolakeias* [*On Flattery*] to Vergil, Quintilius, Plotius, and Varius” (250). The difficulty here is that *Odes* 1.24 contains no reference to flattery.

II. Further Epicurean Elements in *Odes* 1.24

i. *Pudor*

Lines 6-7 present three personified and deified abstractions who will be unable to find the like of Quintilius again: *cui Pudor et Iustitiae soror / incorrupta Fides nudaque Veritas / quando ullum inveniet parem?* They are associated with Quintilius much as other such entities constitute the attendant *komos* of deities in lyric poetry: cf., e.g., *sive tu mavis, Erycina ridens, quam Iocus circum volat et Cupido* (Horace *Odes* 1.2.33-34).¹⁵ As noted above, two of the three abstractions, *Fides* and *Veritas* (7), have previously been linked with Epicurean ethics. The third, *Pudor* (6), echoes *pudor* in the first line of *Odes* 1.24, and in both instances the term implies ‘self-restraint’ (*OLD* s.v. 2a).¹⁶ Horace describes Quintilius’ critical method as involving self-restraint and moderation; he gives frank advice, but, if the recipient’s ears are closed, he desists:

Quintilio siquid recitares, ‘corrige sodes
hoc’ aiebat ‘et hoc’. melius te posse negares
bis terque expertum frustra: delere iubebat 440
et male tornatos incudi reddere versus.
si defendere delictum quam vertere malles,
nullum ultra verbum aut operam insumeabat inanem,
quin sine rivali teque et tua solus amares. (*Ars Poetica* 438-444)

15 See Nisbet-Hubbard 1970: 236 on *Od.* 1.18.14. A comparable group of deified abstractions (*Fides*, *Pax*, *Honos*, *Pudor*, *Virtus*) appears at Hor. *CS* 57-60, but in this case unattached to a lead deity/human.

16 See also D’Agostino 1969: esp. 322 (*pudor/pudicitia* and σωφροσύνη); Reeve 2011. For the association (sometimes quasi-synonymy) of *pudor*’s Greek ‘equivalent’ *aidōs* with *sōphrosynē* see further Cairns 1993: General Index s.v. *sōphrosynē*. The essays of Renaud et al. 2012 concentrate on other aspects of *pudor*.

Quintilius' self-control thus goes even further than that prescribed by Philodemus' in *On Frank Criticism*.¹⁷ There Philodemus notes that Epicurus reproached Pythocles "in moderation" (μετρίως, fr. 6.7-8) cf.(?) fr. 20.1 as restored; he also says that a teacher should respond to a pupil's objections "moderately (again μετρίως, fr. 71.4-6), and that a frank critic should approach an advisee with "moderate reminders" (ἐπ[ε]λθ[ε]ων / μετρίαις ὑπ[ο]μνήσεσιν, fr. 93 N.7-8).¹⁸

Pudor therefore also has Epicurean status as an essential concomitant of παρρησία.¹⁹ Its operation within the ode is visible almost immediately from its start. The function of the first two stanzas is to eulogise the uniqueness of Quintilius. *Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus / tam cari capitis?* (1-2) is usually understood as a rhetorical question, in effect a call for no *pudor* or *modus* in expressions of *desiderium*/πόθος for Quintilius. Similarly, the injunction to the Muse Melpomene (2-3) is (less justifiably) taken as setting no limit to the lamentation that she should initiate.²⁰ This makes lines 1-3 troubling in the light of the standard Epicurean disapproval of excessive mourning.²¹ Apart from noting that Melpomene's *cantus* are *lugubris* (2-3), not unrestrained, there are two ways in which one might reconcile lines 1-3 with what follows. One is to deny that *Quis* etc. is a rhetorical question, and to treat it as a real question, a preliminary to a philosophical discussion. In this case, the initial emphasis on *pudor* and *modus* (1) implies that the *desiderium*/πόθος for Quintilius and Melpomene's laments for him should be regulated by *pudor* and *modus*. In other words, Horace is challenging the appropriateness of a standard topos of the *epicedion/consolatio* – the unrestrained outpouring of grief by

17 References to *On Frank Criticism* are to the edition of Konstan et al. 1988.

18 See also Konstan et al. 1988: 13-14.

19 Thibodeau 2002-2003: 250 comments (correctly) that: "he [Philodemus] repeatedly urges the teacher to tailor his remarks to the character of individual disciples, measure his words carefully, and use full harshness only when necessary (e.g. with a particularly arrogant disciple)"; but he does not connect his remarks to *Pudor*.

20 So, e.g., Nisbet-Hubbard 1970: 281-82 on line 1.

21 Cf. the views of Epicurus (συμπαθῶμεν τοῖς φίλοις οὐ θρηνοῦντες ἀλλὰ φροντίζοντες, Let us have fellow-feeling for our friends, not bewailing them but thinking about them, *Sententiae Vaticanae* 66) and of Philodemus (*On Death* Book 4 col. 100.12-15 Delattre, quoted below §II.ii).

the bereaved.²² The second mode of reconciliation is arguably valid in either case: Horace's follow-up in stanza 2 with *ergo* (5) cools the emotional fervour of the first stanza, shows the poet standing back and assessing the situation, and sees him offering as his 'conclusion' that Quintilius' death is permanent (5-6), before moving on in stanzas 4 and 5 to counsel Virgil's acceptance of his loss. Thibodeau believed that Melpomene takes over as speaker of the ode from line 5 on.²³ Muses do often respond to such invitations as *praecipe* (2) by becoming speakers or joint speakers of the ongoing work,²⁴ but, although in the present instance Melpomene remains Horace's preceptor,²⁵ she does not seem to replace him as speaker. In particular, it is hard to hear the words addressed directly to Virgil at lines 9-12 as spoken by anyone other than Horace himself. Whatever the case, all three personified abstractions attached to Quintilius turn out to be specifically Epicurean in nature.

ii. Philodemus *On Death* Book 4

Odes 1.24 has a direct, apparently unnoticed link with Philodemus *On Death* Book 4, a link which, enriched by its context, places the ode at the heart of that group of Philodemus' students of the 40s BC who later became some of the most eminent writers and critics of the Augustan age. *Odes* 1.24.9 reads: *multis ille bonis flebilis occidit*. Compare Philodemus *On Death* Book 4 col. 100.12-15 Delattre = col. 21.12-15 Henry:

... λυπ[ησομ]ε[ν] οὐς τε πολλοὺς καὶ
ἀγαθοὺς λε[ι]ψομεν] τελευτήσαντες,
ὁ προλαμβα[νό]μενον εὐφ[ραίνει φ]υ-
σικῶς ...

22 For this topos see Esteve-Forriol 1962: 126-27.

23 Thibodeau 2002-2003: 253-54, comparing *Natura* in Lucr. 3.914-51 and Xantho in Philod. AP 9.570 = 14 *GPh.* = 3 Sider.

24 The convention is already visible in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and is echoed throughout antiquity.

25 Cf. *OLD* s.v. *praecipio* 5.b.

et ainsi, nombreux seront les gens de bien qui éprouveront du chagrin quand [nous les laisserons] en mourant – ce dont l’anticipation procure une joie bien naturelle (trans. Delattre 2022: 54-55)

And [we shall have] many good people who will be distressed when we die, anticipation of which thing gladdens (us) naturally (trans. Henry 2009: 49, who reads ἔξομεν in line 13)

The two passages are close enough for Horace’s line to be considered a quotation of Philodemus: *multis* = πολλούς, *bonis* = ἀγαθούς, *flebilis* = λυπηροῦν, and *occidit* = τελευτήσαντες. Moreover, in Epicurean writings *bonis* (= ἀγαθούς) refers specifically to Epicureans – Philodemus *On Gods* 1 col. 12.18 Diels (1916) 20 speaks of “good men” with the same reference: ὁ δ’ Ἐπί-/κουρ[ο]ς ἄνδρας ἀ[γαθοῦ]ς ἐκώλ[υ]ε γοεῖν / τοι[αῦ]τα οἱ ἄν ἐκ[βάλλη] τὸ εὐδοκῆσαι (17-19); and at *On Gods* 3 col. 14.5 (Diels 1917) 37 Philodemus similarly uses σπουδαῖος as a term of approbation with the same reference: ἄλλως τε κ(αὶ) τῆς / πρ(ὸς) τοὺς ὁμοίου[ς] τοῖς σπουδαίο[ις] κοινολογίας ἄ-/φατον ἡδονὴν καταχεούσης (And particularly since, for good human beings, the sharing of discourse with one’s peers pours down indescribable pleasure, 4-6 tr. D. Armstrong 191).²⁶ At *Odes* 1.24.9 *bonis* points to the Epicurean circle to which Quintilius belonged.

Book 4 of Philodemus *On Death* dates from after 50 BC, and more precisely to 45 BC at the latest.²⁷ It was thus roughly contemporary with the three Philodemian works dedicated to the group of four students which included Virgil and Quintilius (above §I). The group may, then, have in addition attended the lecture-course which gave rise to *On Death* Book 4. If they did, Virgil heard Philodemus utter the same sentiment in almost the same words as Horace now addresses to him, and moreover Virgil heard Philodemus’ words in the company of Quintilius (Horace knew the words from the now published *On Death*). In that case the emotional charge carried by Horace’s reminder of the Master’s precept can only be imagined.

26 See Armstrong 2016: 190-91.

27 Delattre 2022: cxlvi.

III The ‘Elephant in the Room’: Varius *On Death*

In addition to the quasi-mythical trio of *Pudor*, *Fides*, and *Veritas* (6-7), *Odes* 1.24 features ‘real’ mythical *personae*: Melpomene, Orpheus, and Mercury. Horace’s treatment of the two divinities appears to conform to Epicurean norms,²⁸ but to lack specifically Epicurean connections. As for Orpheus, the most prominent mythical character in the ode, Philodemus’ surviving mentions of Orpheus again offer nothing tangible: four of them treat Orpheus as the author of Orphic Hymns, while the remaining three rationalise his alleged magical powers.²⁹ The origin and Epicurean significance of Horace’s Orpheus, like those of his Melpomene and Mercury, must rather be sought in earlier poetry, where the tale of Orpheus in Virgil *Georgics* 4.453-529 is most often (and most plausibly) cited as his main inspiration.³⁰ Virgil is usually understood to be viewing Orpheus’ excessive love for Eurydice and his excessive grief over her death (*Georgics* 4.464-466) as breaching the Epicurean ideal of moderation in the expression of emotions. Horace took a similar Epicurean line with regard to love in, e.g., *Odes* 1.5 and 1.33, and to Valgius’ love of and grief for the dead Mystes in *Odes* 2.9, where lines 10-12 (... *nec tibi vespero / surgente decedunt amores / nec rapidum fugiente solem*) appear to echo Virgil’s *te ueniente die, te decedente canebat* (*Georgics* 4.466). Here in *Odes* 1.24 Horace’s Epicurean target is again excessive shows of grief for the death of a loved one, and here too Orpheus reemerges as a negative mythical paradeigma.

Nevertheless, we should not forget Varius, another of Quintilius’ fellow students in the classes of Philodemus, who composed his hexameter work *On Death*³¹ in 44 or 43 BC.³² Its surviving fragments tell us very little about it, and they contain no mythical material. But this poem, written close to the time when Varius was Philodemus’ pupil, must somehow be linked to the recent and homonymous treatise of his teacher – either as

28 On Epicurean attitudes to poetry see e.g. Obbink 1995.

29 See Vassallo 2015.

30 See, e.g. Thibodeau 2002-2003: 247; Davis 2023: 32-33, on which the remainder of this paragraph draws.

31 For its surviving fragments see Hollis 2007: 254-55 (texts), 263-73 (commentary).

32 So Hollis 2007: 264.

a poetically transformed and embellished version of it,³³ or as a work more distant from Philodemus but still influenced by him; and, although *Odes* 1.24 contains no pointer to Varius' *On Death* visible to us, Horace cannot have forgotten its existence. This background, along with Horace's choice to compose *Odes* 1.24 in the Second Asclepiad metre, which permits potential quotation of the first hemistichs of hexameters, emboldens an unevidenced speculation. Might Horace have quoted from Varius' *On Death* in the ode, as we know Virgil quoted Varius in his *Eclogues*?³⁴ If he did, one can imagine no more touching and effective consolation to Virgil for the loss of Quintilius than a borrowing in *multis ille bonis flebilis occidit* (9) from their old comrade Varius' rendering of that dictum of Philodemus.³⁵

Addendum

Subsequent to the acceptance of my paper by *Classica et Mediaevalia* I became aware of Michael McOsker's 'The Epicureanism of Horace, *Odes* 1,24 Revisited: Mourning and Friendship', which appeared in the final fascicle of *Rheinisches Museum* 2024 (167.3-4: 321-44). Focussing primarily on Philodemus' *On the Gods*, McOsker offers several convincing proposals about further Epicurean elements in *Odes* 1.24, discussing in particular (329-35) *vana imago* (15), *modus* (1), and Epicurean grief. There is, however, virtually no overlap between McOsker's paper and my own, which I have therefore left unaltered. F.C.

33 See Hollis 2007: 263-64; and cf. Sedley 1998: esp. 134-65 (= Ch. 5), arguing that Lucretius' *DRN* stands in that relationship to Epicurus' *On Nature*.

34 Varius fr. 150.6 Hollis = Verg. *Ecl.* 8.88; see Hollis 2007: 255; Lebek 2008. The line – *nec serae meminit decedere nocti* – looks to be from the same Orphic context as *Georg.* 4.466 and *Hor. Od.* 2.9.10-11; see Davis 2023: 32-33.

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