

# Horace - Ode I-34

Post by "Joshua" of October 28, 2020 at 2:11 PM

Horace's first collection of Odes was published around 4 years into the reign of Augustus. The political climate may inform our reading of No. 34, translated here by Christopher Smart (1722-1771):

ODE XXXIV.

AGAINST THE EPICURIANS.

A remiss and irregular worshiper of the gods, while I professed the errors of a senseless philosophy, I am now obliged to set sail back again, and to renew the course that I had deserted. For Jupiter, who usually cleaves the clouds with his gleaming lightning, lately drove his thundering horses and rapid chariot through the clear serene; which the sluggish earth, and wandering rivers; at which Styx, and the horrid seat of detested Tænarus, and the utmost boundary of Atlas were shaken. The Deity is able to make exchange between the highest and the lowest, and diminishes the exalted, bringing to light the obscure; rapacious fortune, with a shrill whizzing, has borne off the plume from one head, and delights in having placed it on another.

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In Latin:

XXXIV

Parcus deorum cultor et infrequens,

insanientis dum sapientiae

consultus erro, nunc retrorsum

vela dare atque iterare cursus

cogor relictos: namque Diespiter 5

igni corusco nubila dividens

plerumque, per purum tonantis

egit equos volucremque currum,

quo bruta tellus et vaga flumina,

quo Styx et invisī horrida Taenari 10  
sedes Atlanteusque finis  
concutitur. Valet ima summis  
mutare et insignem attenuat deus,  
obscura promens; hinc apicem rapax  
Fortuna cum stridore acuto  
sustulit, hic posuisse gaudet.

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Smart's title for the Ode does not appear in the Latin text—whether it was his own invention, or the legacy of a long tradition, I do not know. By any road, Horace does seem to be addressing the philosophy of Epicurus, particularly as it relates to *Fortuna*, providence and the gods. I have the Loeb edition at home, which I shall consult this evening.

In the mean time, I'll be looking for clues in the text that might indicate a political motivation. Horace was on the 'wrong side' in the Civil War, as you may remember, and though he was granted amnesty he paid dearly for it. His father's estate near Venusia was claimed by the regime for the resettlement of veterans.

I have two major questions at this time;

Did Horace abandon Epicurean philosophy to satisfy Augustus, and his claim of Divine Right?

Is his reference to Fortuna, and the mighty being laid low, a subtle hint of satire suggesting that a like fate could await the new regime?