

Virgil's Friend Varius Rufus

A paper given to the Virgil Society on 20 March 1993

Horace clearly felt that there were two great contemporary poets who deserved to be mentioned together. Both had close links with the emperor Augustus, and received from him rich material rewards which they justified by the high quality of their verse:

*at neque dedecorant tua de se iudicia atque
munera, quae multa dantis cum laude tulerunt
dilecti tibi Vergilius Variusque poetae.*

(*Epist.* 2.1.245–7)

The Roman People should, but perhaps not always did, recognize their status as modern classics, and thus should allow them the licence for poetic innovation which they willingly granted to the masters of previous generations such as the comic poets Caecilius and Plautus:

*quid autem
Caecilio Plautoque dabit Romanus ademptum
Vergilio Varioque?*

(*Ars Poetica* 53–5)

One of Horace's pair was of course Virgil, and the fact that this Society is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary more than two thousand years after Virgil's death amply bears out Horace's judgment. But there is no Varian Society, and Varius Rufus has retreated into the shadows. We remember him for one thing, his editorship of the *Aeneid* after Virgil's death, and, in this, self-effacement was essential. As George Goold has written, 'No carping critic ever rose to accuse [Varius] of a less

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than satisfactory performance; and if no devotee of Virgil has ever said “well done”, why, that in itself is the consummation of praise.¹ In some cases the loss of a poet’s work may be a just reflection of its quality; not one word survives from the *Annales* of Volusius, mocked by Catullus, nor from the poetry of Bavius and Maevius, whom Virgil derides in the *Eclogues*. Often, however, we are painfully aware of the caprice of fortune: through a slender connexion we possess the poems of Catullus, but we have hardly anything of his close friend Calvus, whom later poets often mention in the same breath without suggesting that Catullus was a superior talent. And, unless one believes that Virgil and Horace let personal friendship cloud their professional judgment, it seems that time has been unjustly harsh to Varius Rufus.

We do not know Varius’ date of birth, but Virgil regards him as senior in the service of the Muses:

*nam neque adhuc Vario videor, nec dicere Cinna
digna, sed argutos inter strepere anser olores
(Ecl. 9.35–6)*

and perhaps also in age, so that Varius might have been born a little before 70 BC. While in his 20s, he was, like Virgil, drawn to an Epicurean community in South Italy, presided over by two Greek Epicurean philosophers, Siro and Philodemus (*vixit [sc. Vergilius] pluribus annis... liberali in otio secutus Epicuri sectam, insigni concordia et familiaritate usus Quintili, Tuccae et Vari*).² It is most satisfactory that we can now point to an Epicurean papyrus fragment (almost certainly by Philodemus) from Herculaneum which beyond question is addressed to all these four friends together.³ We can probably find another reference to Varius as an Epicurean in an anecdote preserved by Quintilian.⁴ I shall return to Varius’ Epicureanism, which seems to have inspired the only poem by him of which we have appreciable knowledge.

Varius apparently left some kind of written memoir about Virgil (Quint. 10.3.8 *Vergilium quoque paucissimos die composuisse versus auctor est Varius*), which must have been of special interest, since he was better placed than almost anyone else to speak of that shy and elusive personality.⁵ We may owe to this same source the famous image of a she-bear licking her cubs into shape, which Virgil himself applied to his own process of composition: *amici...familiaresque P. Vergilii in his,*

quae de ingenio moribusque eius memoriae tradiderunt, dicere eum solitum ferunt parere se versus more atque ritu ursino (Aulus Gellius, *N.A.* 17.10.2). Before leaving Italy for the stay in Greece during which he contracted his fatal illness, Virgil tried to persuade Varius to burn the *Aeneid* should anything happen to him; but Varius resolutely refused, and, after Virgil's death, was charged by Augustus with editing the great poem, a task he fulfilled with exemplary discretion.⁶

Varius Rufus may have been the first poet to become associated with Maecenas—remember that Virgil's original patron was not Maecenas but Asinius Pollio. After the formation of the Second Triumvirate in November 43 BC Varius perhaps felt the need of a powerful protector, since he had recently attacked Antony in terms all too reminiscent of Cicero's *Philippics* (more of this later). The poets themselves may have been keen to widen their circle. Horace tells us that Virgil first, and next Varius, brought him to the attention of Maecenas, probably in 38 BC.⁷ I have sometimes wondered whether Virgil had been struck by the use which Horace's Sixteenth Epode made of his own Fourth Eclogue (the dating seems to fit). No doubt Virgil and Varius introduced Horace to Maecenas as an outstandingly promising young poet—but that is not what Horace says. We would gather from *Sat.* 1.6.55 *dixere quid essem* that they were primarily interested in his moral character rather than his talent, and when Horace speaks of his fellow poets in *Sat.* 1, it is usually their friendship rather than their poetry that he stresses.⁸ So the spirit of the Epicurean community of friends lived on in the circle of Maecenas.

The development of Varius' poetic career is an interesting subject, since, like Virgil's, it seems to have gone through three distinct phases. In the Ninth Eclogue (?41 BC) Virgil speaks of him with awe and admiration (35–6, quoted above) as an established figure comparable to Catullus' friend Helvius Cinna (who must have been the leading Roman poet for almost ten years until he was lynched by the mob at Caesar's funeral in 44 BC). What work of Varius had so impressed Virgil? The answer will come from the Eighth Eclogue: it was a hexameter poem entitled *De Morte*, almost certainly Epicurean in inspiration, which can be dated with some confidence to 44–43 BC and which remained in Virgil's mind throughout the latter's career. Thereafter, it seems, Varius changed tack, and, until at least the mid 30s, he concentrated on traditional epic poetry, probably martial—whether on mythical or contemporary wars

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we simply do not know.⁹ This is strongly implied by Horace, *Sat.* 1.10.43–4 (c. 35 BC):

forte epos acer
ut nemo Varius ducit,

where the epithets *forte* and *acer* point to heroic epic (suiting less well what we know about *De Morte*), and backed up by *Odes* 1.6.1 ff., where Horace suggests that Varius, ‘bird of Homeric song’, would be the right person to celebrate Agrippa’s victories. In *Satires* 1. 10 Horace says that he chose to write Satire because the other branches of poetry had already been claimed by outstanding practitioners; only in Satire could he rise to the top, since he did not think much of the *Satires* of Varro Atacinus (1.10.46). No doubt Horace speaks with tongue in cheek, but there may be a grain of truth in this way of looking at things. About 39 BC Roman Tragedy had an acknowledged master in Asinius Pollio (Virgil, *Ecl.* 8.10 *sola Sophocleo tua carmina digna cothurno*), and that is still the case in 35 BC (Horace, *Sat.* 1.10.42–3 *Pollio regum | facta canit pede ter percusso*). But in that year Sallust died, and his assistant Ateius Philologus passed to Asinius Pollio; Nisbet and Hubbard¹⁰ suggest that this would have been an appropriate moment for Pollio to begin his career as a historian, celebrated in Horace, *Odes* 2.1, which left at least a temporary gap for another Roman tragedian (9–10 *paulum severae Musa tragoediae | desit theatris*). Just about that time Varius Rufus switches from epic to tragedy. Perhaps one motive for Varius’ change of direction was a tactful realization that, whatever success he himself had achieved, his younger friend Virgil possessed even greater talent for serious hexameter poetry. Horace, *Odes* 1.6 (? soon after 29 BC), perhaps more gratifying to Varius than to Agrippa, seems to bring together almost all the different phases of Varius’ poetic career. Martial epic is represented by the opening address to Agrippa (1–4 *Scriberis Vario fortis et hostium | victor Maeonii carminis alite, | quam rem cumque ferox navibus aut equis | miles te duce gesserit*), tragedy (and particularly the *Thyestes*, first produced in 29 BC) by line 8 *saevam Pelopis domum*. And if one believes in the existence of a Varian *Panegyricus Augusti*, one might see a reference to it (as a future project?) in line 11 *laudes egregii Caesaris*.

We do not know how long Varius lived after his editing of the *Aeneid* was complete (?16 or 15 BC), nor whether he continued to write poetry

until the end of his life. Ovid, *Epistulae ex Ponto* 4.16.31 is puzzling:

cum Varius Gracchusque darent fera dicta tyrannis.

At first sight there is no problem; Ovid refers to Varius' *Thyestes* (and perhaps to other tragedies of his). But Ovid is writing about AD 17, and almost all the other poets mentioned in this catalogue belong to the later years of Augustus. So, if the Varius here is our poet—and I continue to consider that more probable than not¹¹—perhaps he lived on and continued his career as a tragedian for some years after 15 BC. The only play by Varius which was still widely read and admired a century later was the *Thyestes*; among several testimonia the most fulsome is in Quintilian 10.1.98, *Vari Thyestes cuilibet Graecarum comparari potest*. Varius' hexameter verse seems to have sunk almost without trace; Quintilian fails to mention it, and the only clear imitation which I have found in Silver poetry is of fr. 4 (text below) by Silius Italicus.¹²

Let us now turn to the fragments of Varius' own poetry. Four of these, totalling just 12 hexameters, are preserved for us by the scholar Macrobius, because they are imitated by Virgil. They come from a poem entitled *De Morte*, which must predate the Eighth Eclogue. Several older scholars thought that the poem dealt with the death of Julius Caesar, some even (without any warrant) expanding the title to *De Morte Caesaris*. But there is a much more plausible way of looking at the poem. We have seen (above) that Varius had strong links with Epicurean philosophy, and one of the chief Epicurean ambitions was to free mankind from the fear of death, by arguing that 'death has nothing to do with us' (Lucretius 3.830 *nil igitur mors est ad nos*). And Philodemus, one of the mentors of Varius' group, wrote a Greek prose treatise *On Death* (περὶ θανάτου) in 44 or 43 BC. It seems highly probable that this, together with Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, inspired Varius to write *De Morte*. Interestingly, Virgil in both *Eclogue* 8 and *Georgics* 2 interweaves echoes of Lucretius with echoes of Varius, suggesting that his two sources were in harmony with each other.

Fr. 1¹³ indicates that Varius' poem also made allusions to contemporary events, which, as things turned out, might have been highly dangerous to their author:

*vendidit hic Latium populis, agrosque Quiritum
eripuit; fixit leges pretio atque refixit.*

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Servius, commenting on *Aen.* 6.622 *fixit leges pretio atque refixit* writes *possumus Antonium accipere*, without mentioning that Virgil borrowed the phrase verbatim from Varius Rufus. That Varius had intended a recognizable allusion to Mark Antony is put beyond doubt by the rest of fr. 1, which is redolent of the attacks on Antony in Cicero's *Philippics*—we know the consequences to Cicero of these. *Fixit leges pretio atque refixit* refers to the laws passed by Antony as consul in 44 BC, allegedly representing the wishes of the murdered Julius Caesar (e.g. *Phil.* 3.30 *falsas leges C. Caesaris nomine et falsa decreta...figenda curaverit*). In line 1 'he sold Latium to the nations', 'Latium' no doubt refers to *ius Latii*, 'Latin rights', a lower status than, but sometimes a stepping-stone to, full Roman citizenship. 'Robbing citizens of their estates' (1–2 *agrosque Quiritum | eripuit*) is especially interesting. We know, particularly from the First and Ninth Eclogues, of the sufferings caused by land confiscations after the battle of Philippi (42 BC); much less is heard of the similar legislation, a consular Lex Antonia Cornelia Agraria, which Mark Antony sponsored in June 44 BC. Antony's brother Lucius played a leading part on the Board of Seven (*septemviri*), and Cicero writes of the latter 'He divided up estates, whichever ones he wished; there was no right of appeal for the private citizen, no chance to plead for exemption on grounds of equity. The owner was allowed to keep no more of his property than what Antonius had left behind.'¹⁴ This law was annulled some six months later, in January 43 BC. Varius Rufus contrasts Antony's corrupt generosity towards foreigners (*vendidit hic Latium populis*) with his harsh treatment of Roman citizens (*agrosque Quiritum | eripuit*). No wonder that, after Philippi, Antony entrusted the settlement of veteran soldiers (with its resulting unpopularity) to his junior partner Octavian.

Varius fr. 2 probably also belongs to this attack on Antony:

incubet ut Tyriis atque ex solido bibat auro.

If we allow the poet a somewhat free use of sequence,¹⁵ the two fragments could even be consecutive; the run of the passage would then be closely similar to *Georgics* 2.505–6 *hic petit excidiis urbem magnosque penatis, | ut gemma bibat et Sarrano* ['Phoenician'] *dormiat ostro*. In Virgil, *hic* is part of a long sequence 'one man...another'; perhaps likewise in Varius Antony served as just one illustration among many of human failings. Virgil's imitation is typically subtle: while in Varius

incubet clearly means 'reclines', on a couch at a banquet, Virgil picks it up with *dormiat*, 'sleeps'; then he has both *incubat* and *auro* in the very next line—but in a different sense, of brooding over buried treasure (*condit opes alius defossoque incubat auro*). If you wonder what place such a passage might have in an Epicurean poem on Death, we must look at Lucretius 3.59–86, where the poet explains that a frenzied search for power and wealth is prompted 'to no small extent' (64) by fear of death. Frs. 3 and 4 are both similes. We can only guess, but in both cases a philosophical application is easy enough to imagine. Fr. 3¹⁶ describes the training of a spirited horse:

*quem non ille sinit lentae moderator habenae
qua velit ire, sed angusto prius orbe coercens
insultare docet campis, fingitque morando,*

perhaps analogous to the training of the mind or subduing of the passions, as in a passage from Horace which may even reflect Varius' lines (*Epist.* 1.2.64–5 *fingit equum tenera docilem cervice magister | ire viam qua monstrat eques*).

The six-line simile which describes a hunting-dog (fr. 4) is worth lingering over:

*ceu canis umbrosam lustrans Gortynia vallem,
si veteris potuit cervae comprehendere lustra,
saevit in absentem et, circa vestigia latrans,
aethera per nitidum tenues sectatur odores;
5 non amnes illam medii, non ardua tardant
†perdita†,¹⁷ nec serae meminit decedere nocti.*

Just as if, when traversing a shady valley, a Cretan hound has been able to discover the lair of a long-lived deer; she expresses her fury against it in its absence and, barking around the tracks, follows the fine scent through the clear air; rivers in the way do not slow her down, nor...¹⁷ heights, nor does she care to give way to the onset of night.

It seems to me that the quality of these lines is superb, and the style most interesting. We might expect a hexameter poem written in 44 or

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43 BC. to show the influence of Catullus and his school. But the trademarks of Catullus' hexameters (e.g. the spondaic fifth foot, the pronounced end-stopping or the monotonous pattern with a word of three long syllables after the masculine caesura) are entirely absent from here. Nor does the style recall Lucretius, with his polysyllabic or monosyllabic line-endings and sometimes inelegant rhythms. Instead, we seem to have here a new style, much more like the young Virgil—perhaps intermediate between the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*. This raises the possibility (in accord with the admiration for Varius expressed in the Ninth Eclogue) that Varius Rufus was a really important influence in the formation of Virgil's style. Coming on to the text of the last line, I have marked *perdita* as corrupt. Many see nothing wrong with it, and hence put the comma after *tardant* (5). In that case Virgil would have borrowed the line whole¹⁸ to conclude his own simile describing a heifer which has lost her calf:

*qualis cum fessa iuvenum
per nemora atque altos quaerendo bucula lucos
propter aquae rivum viridi procumbit in ulva
perdita, nec serae meminit decedere nocti.*
(Ecl. 8.85–8)

I suspect, however, that *perdita* has intruded from the text of the Eclogue into the Varian fragment,¹⁹ and that Virgil borrowed only *nec serae meminit decedere nocti*. 'Desperate' (*perdita*) very well suits the heifer in Virgil, but seems much less appropriate to Varius' hunting-dog. There is another, typically artful, imitation of Varius' lines in Virgil, which may help us:

*non scopuli rupesve cavae atque obiecta retardant
flumina.*
(Geo. 3.253–4)

Virgil's *retardant* corresponds to Varius' *tardant*, and *obiecta... | flumina* to *amnes...medii*. Note also that Virgil's words form a tricolon, ending after the first foot of the second line (*flumina*);²⁰ perhaps we should seek to restore a (larger) tricolon structure in the last two lines of Varius fr. 4, by marking *perdita* as corrupt and placing a comma after it. The most obvious replacement for *perdita* would be a noun; accordingly J.A. Willis²¹

suggested *culmina*, 'peaks', without being entirely happy with it.²² Alternatively we could take *ardua* as a noun, and look for an agreeing adjective.²³ Virgil's *scopuli rupesve cavae* (words likely to correspond to the corrupt phrase in Varius) create a particularly 'rocky' impression. We could match this in the Varius fragment by replacing †*perdita*† with *scrupea*. The adjective *scrupeus* ('composed of sharp rocks or projections of rock', *OLD*) comes from archaic high-flown poetry—it is attested in the tragic fragments of Ennius, Pacuvius and Accius. Virgil writes *spelunca... | scrupea* in *Aen.* 6.237–8, and Servius' comment ad loc. shows that *scrupea* would go excellently with *tardant* in Varius, since the literal reference of *scrupus* is to a sharp stone which impedes progress (*scrupus proprie est lapillus brevis qui incedentibus impedimento est*).²⁴ We then would have a two-line tricolon, with each successive limb growing in length:

*non amnes illam medii, non ardua tardant
scrupea, nec serae meminit decedere nocti.*

This splendid simile stayed in Virgil's mind throughout his career.²⁵ One possible application of the simile in an Epicurean didactic poem might be a determination to seek and find the truth—Lucretius uses a hunting-dog for this very purpose in *DRN* 1.404–6 *namque canes ut montivagae persaepe ferai | naribus inveniunt intectas fronde quietes | cum semel institerunt vestigia certa viai*.²⁶

When one works on a poet preserved only in fragments, part of the fun lies in the hope of discovering hitherto unrecognized quotations or allusions; of course a high degree of scepticism and detachment is necessary. As far as I am aware, nobody before has suggested that the following snippet in the Christian writer Lactantius (*De Opificio Dei* 18.2)²⁷ might contain a reference to Varius Rufus, *De Morte*:

*idcirco animum et animam indifferenter appellant duo
Epicurei poetae.*

One of the pair is undoubtedly Lucretius; indeed we can identify the particular lines to which Lactantius (or his source) refers as *DRN* 3.421–3 *tu fac utrumque uno sub iungas nomine eorum, | atque animam verbi causa cum dicere pergam, | mortalem esse docens, animum quoque*

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dicere credas. But who is the second Epicurean poet? Lactantius himself might have been unable to tell us; perhaps he has taken over this nugget of information without fully comprehending it. But Varius Rufus would be a most suitable candidate. As we have seen, his Epicurean connexions are firmly attested. Virgil seems to associate Lucretius, *DRN* with Varius, *De Morte* since he combines imitations of the two poems both in the Eighth Eclogue (85–8) and the Second Georgic (505–12). And, of course, a poem *De Morte* would give plenty of scope for discussing *animus* and *anima*.

Having praised Varius for his high-class poetic technique in the longest fragment of *De Morte*, I come now to the alleged verbatim quotation in Horace, *Epistles* 1.16 from a *Panegyricus Augusti* by Varius:

*tene magis saluum populus velit an populum tu
servet in ambiguo qui consulit et tibi et urbi
Iuppiter* (Epist. 1.16.27–9)

According to Pseudacro ad loc., *haec...Var< i>us de Augusto scripserat*, but I must say that I do not believe this. The sentiments may seem jejune to us, but are credible in a panegyric; not so the style. Would a poet capable of the hunting-dog simile produce for Augustus such sloppy and sub-standard writing as the line-endings *an populum tu* and *et tibi et urbi*? These are appropriate in the hexameters of the *Epistles*, which are first cousins to the *Satires*, but do not suit a high-flown *Panegyric*. Perhaps Varius did indeed write a *Panegyric* of Augustus;²⁸ conceivably it included sentiments such as these. But this surely is not a verbatim quotation.

Of Varius' acknowledged masterpiece, the tragedy *Thyestes*, we have just one certain fragment, spoken by Atreus and preserved for us by Quintilian (3.8.45):

*iam fero infandissima,
iam facere cogor.*

There is also the following entry in a Paris manuscript:²⁹

*INCIPIT THUESTES VARII. Lucius Varius cognomento Rufus
Thyesten tragoediam magna cura absolutam post Actiacam*

*victoriam Augusti ludis eius in scaena edidit, pro qua fabula
sestertium deciens accepit.*

On this Housman wrote,³⁰ 'One day towards the end of the eighth century the scribe of Cod. Paris. Lat. 7530 ...began to copy out for us..the *Thyestes* of Varius. He transcribed the title and the prefatory note... Then he changed his mind; he proceeded with a list of the *notae* employed by Probus and Aristarchus, and the masterpiece of Roman tragedy has rejoined its author in the shades.' Be that as it may,³¹ we learn that the tragedy was first produced in connexion with celebrations for the victory of Actium, whether in 29 BC (the year of Octavian's Triple Triumph) or 28 BC (the dedication of Palatine Apollo), and that Varius received one million sesterces—though this sum must be viewed with caution—two and a half times the property qualification of a Roman knight. One can imagine that Varius' *Thyestes* made a great impact.³² The previous master of Roman Tragedy was Asinius Pollio, whose plays, like his speeches, were stiff and archaic, in the manner of the old Roman tragedians Pacuvius and Accius (Tacitus, *Dialogus* 21.7 *Pacuvium certe et Accium non solum tragoediis sed etiam orationibus suis expressit; adeo durus et siccus est*). The *Thyestes* of Varius (to be followed by the *Medea* of Ovid) may have been the first Latin tragedy to be written in a modern style which reflected the advances in technique made by other branches of Roman poetry.³³

The fragment of *Thyestes* quoted above exemplifies the *fera dicta* of tyrants (Ovid, *Epistulae ex Ponto* 4.16.31) which would be at home in Roman Tragedy of any period. But another tragic fragment of Varius, written in anapaests, makes a totally different impression (text slightly varied from Klotz, *Scaen. Rom. Frag.* I p. 309):

*primum huic
nervis septem est intenta fides
variique apti vocum moduli,
ad quos mundi resonat canor in
5 sua se vestigia volventis.*

Apparently from an encomium of Mercury, with particular reference to his invention of the lyre, these lines describe how the god tuned his seven-stringed instrument in harmony with the music of the spheres:

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‘he was the first to stretch the lyre with seven strings, and to fit on it the different intervals of sound, in harmony with which the tuneful Universe re-echoes as it revolves backwards over its own path’. Does this passage belong to the *Thyestes*? That possibility can by no means be ruled out, but it is far from obvious how such sentiments could fit the myth of the abominable brothers.³⁴ We have no reason to think that Varius’ fame as a tragedian rested on only one play;³⁵ it is rather more probable, in my opinion, that the lines come from a quite different tragedy. Their style is exceptionally elegant; their subject-matter inhabits the world of Platonic philosophy (the harmony of the spheres), of learned Hellenistic³⁶ and Latin neoteric³⁷ poetry. Together with the simile of the hunting-dog (fr. 4), this fragment gives the most favourable impression of Varius’ poetic talent. Although the ancient Virgilian commentators do not draw the parallel,³⁸ Virgil shows his admiration for the last two lines when he writes of the recurring toil of the farmer:

*redit agricolis labor actus in orbem
atque in se sua per vestigia volvitur annus.*
(*Georgics* 2.401–2)

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NOTES

1. In S.J. Harrison (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Vergil's Aeneid* (Oxford 1990) 87.
2. *Vita Probiana* 10–12 (p. 27 ed. Hardie). Quintilius Varus is lamented by Horace in *Odes* 1.24; according to some sources, Plotius Tucca shared the editing of the *Aeneid* with Varius Rufus.
3. M. Gigante and M. Capasso, *SIFC* 82 (1989) 4 lines 21–3 ὁ Πλώτιε καὶ Οὐάριε καὶ Οὐεργίλιε καὶ Κοιντίλιε. Varius Rufus appears twice elsewhere in the same papyrus collection.
4. Quint. 6.3.78 *L. Var<i>o Epicurio, Caesaris amico*. The interpretation of this passage was challenged by C. Murgia in *CQ* N.S. 41 (1991) 189–93, a discussion described by E. Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* (Oxford 1993) 271 as ‘misguided’.
5. The later scholiastic tradition drew Varius into some of the tall stories which grew up around Virgil—stories which involved sexual favours, plagiarism and even murder (J. Hubaux, ‘La “maitresse” de Virgile’, *REL* 12 (1934) 343–59). Part of the trouble may have been caused by confusion of Varius Rufus with Alfenus Varus and/or Quintilius Varus.

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6. *Vita Donati* 153–61 (p. 15 ed. Hardie) *egerat* [sc. *Vergilius*] *cum Vario priusquam Italia decederet, ut siquid sibi accidisset, Aeneida combureret; at is facturum se pernegarat...edidit autem auctore Augusto Varius, sed summatim emendata, ut qui versus etiam imperfectos sicut erant reliquerit.*

7. *Sat.* 1.6.55 *Vergilius, post hunc Varius, dixere quid essem.*

8. Particularly *Sat.* 1.5.40–2 *Plotius et Varius Sinuessae Vergiliusque | occurrunt, animae quales neque candidiores | terra tulit, neque quis me sit devinctior alter*, also e.g. 1.9.22–3 *non Viscum pluris amicum | non Varium facies.*

9. E. Courtney is perhaps over-sceptical in doubting whether Varius brought any such work to publication (*The Fragmentary Latin Poets* 271).

10. *A Commentary on Horace, Odes Book II* (Oxford 1978) 9–10.

11. M. Helzle, *Publii Ovidii Nasonis Epistularum ex Ponto liber IV* (Zurich/New York 1989) 190–1 prints †*Varus*† as a lemma, and, surprisingly, becomes entangled in the kind of scholiastic fiction mentioned in n. 5 above.

12. *Punica* 10.77–82 *ut canis occultos agitat cum Belgicus apros | erroresque ferae sollers per devia mersa | nare legit, tacitoque premens vestigia rostro | lustrat inaccessos venantum indagine saltus, | nec sistit nisi, conceptum sectatus odorem, | deprendit spissis arcana cubilia dumis.* The parallel was noted by Baehrens. One might wonder whether Silius knew just the lines quoted as Varius fr. 4 from either a commentary on the Eighth Eclogue or a collection of Virgil's borrowings from other poets. But (to take a case involving another poet) we owe Helvius Cinna fr. 1 Morel, Courtney to a grotesque misunderstanding by the grammarian Charisius; Silius not only imitates those lines in detail (*Punica* 13.86–9), but also, I believe, gives a clue to their original context in Cinna. So I am quite prepared to accept that Silius still read Latin hexameter poetry which had fallen out of fashion.

13. The numeration in Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets*, is the same as in Morel.

14. *Phil.* 5.20.

15. With *incubet* standing for the metrically intractable *incubaret* (Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* 272 thinks this hardly possible).

16. Quoted by Macrobius as a parallel to Virgil, *Georgics* 3.116–17 *equitem docuere sub armis | insultare solo et gressus glomerare superbos.*

17. The textual problem will be discussed below.

18. In itself that is quite credible; Virgil almost certainly (some scholars are sceptical) borrowed two lines whole from Varro Atacinus for the *Georgics* (1.377 and 2.404).

19. In such a case a suggested emendation need not be so close to the letters of the intruding word.

20. Thereafter the line of Virgil goes its own way with *correptosque unda torquentia montis.*

21. *Rh. M.* 100 (1957) 162.

22. 'Too high up', as Professor Nisbet commented to me.

23. As in *Georgics* 3.291 *deserta per ardua*, Valerius Flaccus 2.516 *Rhiphaea per ardua.*

24. Whence the metaphorical sense which we see reflected in 'scruple', 'scrupulous'.

25. *Eclogues* 8.85–8 and *Georgics* 3.253–4 (both quoted above) and *Aen.* 9.63 *saevit in absentes.* Note also the imitation by Silius Italicus quoted in n. 12.

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26. These lines might even be Varius' model.

27. R.M. Ogilvie, *JThS* N.S. 26 (1975) 411–12 suggests that the second Epicurean poet may be Varro Atacinus. But there is no evidence that Atacinus was an Epicurean, and the texts that Ogilvie relies on to show that a Varro wrote in verse *de rerum natura* more probably point to Varro of Reate.

28. Which may be alluded to also in *Odes* 1.6.11 and *Epist.* 2.1.245–7.

29. Cod. Par. Lat. 7530 fol. 28^r. 1–5 (cf. H. Jocelyn, *CQ* N.S. 30 (1980) 387).

30. *The Classical Papers of A.E. Housman* (eds J. Diggle and F.R.D. Goodyear (1972)) III.941.

31. Jocelyn (*CQ* N.S. 30 (1980) 399) sees things rather differently: 'Copies of Varius' tragedy, like other rarities, could have survived a long time in the odd library, little consulted and gradually rotting away. I suggest that the surviving parchment of one such copy was at some stage washed along with bits of unused or unusable ancient books in order to provide material for copying a collection of works on grammar, and the title and its explanatory note, because of their position either at the bottom or at the top of a relatively unused page, escaped the wash.'

32. Again, it is reasonable to ask whether any fragment of (or reference to) Varius' *Thyestes* has survived anonymously. Two candidates offer themselves (neither suggestion is new). (a) Two and a half iambic lines quoted by Seneca (*Epist. Mor.* 80.7) *en impero Argis: regna mihi liquit Pelops | qua ponto ab Helles atque ab Ionio mari | urgetur Isthmos*. Clearly spoken by Atreus—if not the opening words of a play, at least the first words of Atreus on stage. One might wonder whether Seneca composed these lines himself, or whether (as Cicero sometimes does) he is translating a lost Greek play, but for the fact that Quintilian (9.4.140) also quotes the first line anonymously (with *sceptra* for *regna*). Perhaps, therefore, in the time of both Seneca and Quintilian these lines were so well known that it was unnecessary to specify their author. The style does not seem that of archaic tragedy, and the *Thyestes* of Varius is quite a plausible ascription. Quintilian is responsible for our only certain fragment of Varius' *Thyestes* and it is faintly possible that he has the same play in mind at 11.3.73 *ut sit Aerope in tragoedia tristis*.

(b) A snippet from a declamation, in Seneca Rhetor, *Contr.* 1. 1.21, *cur fugis fratrem? scit ipse*. The metre appears to be trochaic (one might consider reversing the order of *fugis* and *fratrem* to produce the end of an iambic line and the start of its successor). The speaker is said to be Thyestes. If so, he seemingly answers someone who tries to reconcile him with his brother Atreus (cf. Seneca, *Thyestes* 421–90, where young Tantalus makes such an attempt), by quoting the would-be reconciler's words: '“Why do you flee from your brother?” *He* knows.' Alternatively, we might divide the quotation between two speakers: the reconciler asks *cur fugis fratrem?* and Thyestes replies *scit ipse*. According to the Elder Seneca, this tragic verse won thunderous applause when inserted into his declamation by Porcius Latro (who taught rhetoric to the young Ovid). Perhaps the quotation comes from a tragedy which was currently all the rage.

33. Note the phrase *magna cura absolutam* in the Paris manuscript mentioned above.

34. According to Apollodorus (*Epitome* 2.12) Hermes is sent by Zeus as a messenger to Atreus. An undergraduate pupil suggested to me that there might have been lyre-playing at Varius' Thyestean banquet.

VIRGIL'S FRIEND VARIUS RUFUS

35. For what this is worth (not much), Porf. on Horace, *Odes* 1.6.1–2 describes Varius as *tragoediarum...auctor*.

36. Eratosthenes, *Hermes* frs. 13 and 15–16 Powell (with *Supplementum Hellenisticum* 397A) and Alexander of Ephesus, *Suppl. Hell.* 21.

37. Varro Atacinus fr. 14 Morel = 15 Courtney.

38. Richard Thomas in his Commentary admires the image of *Georgics* 2.401–2, but seems unaware of the Varius fragment; R.A.B. Mynors quotes the last two lines of Varius in a corrupt form. Of course it is conceivable that Varius, rather than Virgil, is the imitator.

