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The fifth epistle is another invitation, this time to his friend Torquatus, apparently the last survivor of an important family, the Manlii Torquati. He was probably the younger son of the consul of Horace's year of birth, one of Catullus's closest friends, an Epicurean from the school of Philodemus. The poet Philodemus, whose charred works were buried in the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum, shared his Epicurean philosophy with his friends Catullus and Lucretius. He was later a mentor to Vergil and Horace, who addressed his *Ars Poetica* to Lucius Calpurnius Piso, owner of the Villa of the Papyri.

The invitation to a dinner where the food will be plain, but the company rich, echoes a pair of earlier poems, Catullus 13, and its probable model, by Philodemus, both playing on Epicurean moderation. The Catullus poem is addressed to a client of Calpurnius Piso (father of Horace's associate), and might be summarized in this form:

Dear friend, come to my house to dine  
in a couple of days. Just bring  
an entrée, dessert, a bottle of wine,  
and some jokes. I don't have a thing.

Except you'll meet with my latest girl,  
exquisitely scented Rose.  
The very moment you start to inhale  
you'll wish you were made all nose.

The Philodemus poem is also an invitation in Epicurean terms, to the same Piso. The conclusion is inescapable that Horace's two poems to Torquatus (who was later addressed in the famous ode 'Diffugere nives' of book 4) assume a long shared connection, through the family, Philodemus, and the Pisones, with Epicureanism. The most Horatian of all imitations is Ben Jonson's of this epistle: *Inviting a Friend to Supper*, a poem of superior ease and wit. My version, a loose approximation of the original, is for Judith Barrington.

*Comfort above all. Chairs built to cradle  
a worn spine. Plain dishes served  
with a sturdy wine.*

*We meet at the border  
of youth and age, that narrow space  
between epicure and sage.*

*The wine's a recent vintage, grown  
on local moors. If you've a better bottle,  
let's enjoy yours.*

*Drink loosens the tongue, so all  
our sallies hit. A little tipsy,  
we are infused with wit.*

*Friendship is buried rhyme, old  
echoes heard. A sonorous underburden  
deepens each word.*

*We'll talk of absent friends, seize  
the departing hour, search out each hidden  
late-blooming flower.*

*And that important business? Look,  
it can wait. Practise elusiveness. Slip  
through the garden gate.*



'Search out each hidden late-blooming flower'