

## Presence and the Future Tense in Horace's *Odes*

Horace is sometimes thought to profess in the *Odes* a “poetics of presence” (Lowrie [1997] 57-58) or a “CD” philosophy (Davis [1991] 145), that is, a philosophical or aesthetic orientation that privileges temporal or physical presence. On the other hand, true dramatic presence is extremely rare in the *Odes* (Citroni [1995] 274-75); only occasionally are there clear and unambiguous markers of an ongoing scene (as in 1.27), or demonstrative pronouns that point to something seen by both speaker and addressee (*huc* 2.3.13, *hac ... pinu* 2.11.13-14, *harum arborum* 2.14.22, *hic paries* 3.26.6). The poet shows a distinct preference for more subtle and more ambiguous means of defining the present of a poem, and one of the most powerful tools at his disposal is the future tense.

In this paper I will examine examples of three related uses of the future tense in the *Odes*. The first is the use of a future verb as “a polite imperative” (Nisbet and Hubbard [1970] 204)--for example, *pones* at 1.16.3, or *potabis* at 1.20.1. This is a recognized use of the Latin future, and is also familiar in English (Gildersleeve and Lodge [1895] 162). Such a usage is clearly related to the frequent imperatives and other directive expressions of address, a figure which is thought by some to be the defining feature of the *Odes* (Heinze [1923], Nisbet and Hubbard [1970] xxiv), and is also often associated with presence (Lowrie [1997] 20-21). On the other hand, a future verb may illustrate the present moment of a poem by contrast; so, for example, *tepebunt* at 1.4.20 looks to Lycidas' future manhood to illustrate his present adolescence, *tenebit* at 1.7.20 implies Plancus' absence from Tibur by speculating about his future presence and *bibes* at 1.20.10 depicts the speaker's present humble offering by contrasting the expensive vintages Maecenas will drink in the future. A third usage, which draws the focus even further away from the present, postpones the event contemplated by the poem until a future time: thus *cras donaberis* at 3.13.3 puts off the sacrifice for another day, just as *cras ... curabis* at 3.17.14-15 defers Aelius Lamia's celebration. In this same vein is the suggestive future of *inseres* at 1.1.35, which asks Maecenas to postpone his judgment until he has read the whole collection, or *loquar* at 3.25.18, which concludes the poem by anticipating a godlike poetical utterance.

In Pindaric scholarship, the view that the first person future indicative is “a conventional element of the enkomiast style” (Bundy [1969] 21 cf. also Slater [1969]), and so may be treated as a present has recently been refuted in detail by Pfeijffer (1999), who argues that the futurity of these verbs is in fact quite meaningful; for instance, a verb in the future tense may add to the illusion of spontaneity, the impression that the poem is being composed on the spot (Pfeijffer [1999] 34). Horace's own use of the future tense has the same compressed suggestive power, and in fact the three uses just outlined combine to reinforce implicitly the poet's complex understanding of the nature of time. A future verb with an imperative sense already, even as it expects the attentive presence of the addressee, points to an event not yet occurred, a wish not yet fulfilled; in the same way, any focus on the future, whether this involves using the future to illustrate the present by contrast, or constructing a whole poem around the anticipation of some critical event, subtly demonstrates how ineffable the present is, how difficult to grasp, and how greatly diminished by the enormity of time before and after.

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