

## Horace as an Advocate for Moderation in the *Odes*

Throughout his works, Horace promotes specific ideals and ways of life in the manner of an orator or philosopher. Davis (1991) has shown that Horace uses rhetoric in order to persuade his readers toward a specific view of the world. In this paper I argue that Horace implements specific rhetorical strategies in his poetic collection, the *Odes*, to persuade his audience to embrace moderation. Horace stacks his *Odes* with devices such as alliteration, enjambment, and a variety of meters to further his argument against extremes. First, I consider *Odes* 2.10, where Horace establishes that he is advising his addressee, Licinius, on how to live correctly and moderately: *Rectius vives, Licini, neque altum/ semper urgendo neque, dum procellas/ cautus horrescis, nimium premendo/ Litus iniquum*; “You will live more correctly, Licinius, by not always plunging into the deep sea, nor, while cautious you shudder at storms, by keeping too close to the hostile shore” (1-4). Here, Horace directly and deliberately advises Licinius to avoid extreme behavior. He does this by using the second person future, which acts as a command, and the ablative gerunds (*urgendo* and *premando*), which serve as instructions for the means by which Licinius should follow Horace’s command.

This paper also considers *Odes* 1.4, where Horace uses alliteration, enjambment and a slowing pace of the meter in order to aid in his argument for moderation. They show that there is always a right time to act in a certain way, and that mortality is imminent for everyone regardless of class. In lines 13-15, Horace manipulates the aural qualities of the Latin to press his point: *Pallida Mors aequo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas/ regnumque turris. O beate Sesti, / vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam*; “Pale Death knocks on the huts of the poor and the towers of the rich with an impartial foot. O happy Sestius, the greatest span of life forbids us

to begin a long hope (for the future).” The alliteration of the labial consonant *p* could be interpreted as a “barrage of kicks” (Nisbet and Hubbard 1970: 68) as Death knocks on the doors of mortals. I would add that the sound of knocking is aided by the scansion and rhythm of line 13, which contains several long syllables in a row. Not coincidentally, Horace also draws attention to the line’s meter by its technical term *pede*. The cumulative effect of rhythm and meter draws attention to its slowing pace that resembles the rolling knock of death. By performing Death in this way, the suggestion is that he is here *right now* that creates a sense of urgency.

Other ways that Horace creates urgency is through his use of enjambment between lines 13-14. Here, Death’s knocks spill onto the next line. It is as if Death arrives so quickly that the verses themselves cannot contain him. Finally, in line 15, Horace continues this sense of urgency by offering a brief moment of hope, but he then immediately negates it; for instance, *summa*, which gives the impression that life will be long, is immediately negated by *brevis* and *spem*. *vetat* follows, which confirms that the hope (*spem*) is forbidden. The negative word (*vetat*) pops up later in the sentence, which breaks off the illusion of hope offered initially by *spem*. The word order then suggests that death may strike without warning. Overall, Horace’s combined use of rhetorical and poetic devices such as alliteration, metrical rhythms, and enjambment both performs and conveys a heightened sense of urgency that time is fleeting. This urgency speaks to Horace’s larger theme of moderation in the *Odes*, as I argue in this presentation, namely that the limits of time create boundaries within which humans must moderate their hopes.

### Bibliography

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