

CARPE DIEM

ODES 1.11

This ode to Leuconoe has elements of a serious, statement of philosophical and ethical values (e.g., is it better not to foresee the future, is it better to endure whatever will be) as well as elements of what looks like an attempted seduction of Leuconoe. How one reads this poem will depend in part on how one interprets the role and interests of the speaker. Is he attempting to impart wisdom for its own sake? Or is he developing a rhetorical strategy whose purpose is winning over Leuconoe for himself?

Meter: Fifth or Greater Asclepiadean

BEFORE YOU READ WHAT HORACE WROTE

The famous phrase "*carpe diem*" comes from this poem. What do you think it means? It is typically translated "seize the day." Using your **Wordbank** below, how else might you translate it? Does "pluck" the day, despite sounding a bit strange in English, capture some additional sense of the phrase? Does the idea of plucking a flower—something that grows, comes to fullness, and then dies—add to what the phrase "*carpe diem*" means?

Think about some situations in your own life when you could imagine telling someone else to "seize/pluck the day." Consider the circumstances and why this would be your response. How might it matter what your relationship is, if any, to the person you are addressing?

The name of the woman to whom the poem is addressed, Leuconoe, comes from the Greek *leukos* (clear, bright, white) and *nous* (mind) and may suggest equally "clear-minded" or "empty-minded" (empty headed). Consider how this ambiguity may affect your interpretation of the poem.

Important Vocabulary

The theme of time is a significant one in Horace's odes. Here are some important "time" words from the *Odes* that would be good for you to learn. Below is the dictionary entry for each one.

hōra, -ae, f. hour, time, season

dīēs, **dīēi**, m., (f.) day

This word is normally masculine. Treat it that way here. (Don't confuse with "**deus**, -ī, m. god.")

Remember the Latin for "day" begins "*di-*" while the word for "god" begins "*de-*."

spatium, -iī, n. space, period of time

aetās, **aetātis**, f. time, age

Do not confuse with **aestās**, **aestātis**, f. summer

vēr, **vēris**, n. spring

hiems, **hiemis**, f. winter, storm

Now It's Your Turn

Exercise A

Translate the following phrases into English using the "time" words above and the vocabulary below. Identify the case of the time phrase. If there are two possibilities, list them both. Consult the reference grammar in the Appendix if you need to review your noun or adjective endings.

Example:

Latin	English translation	case(s)
vēr breve	short spring	nom., acc.
invida aetās	_____	_____
hiems longa	_____	_____
vēr longum	_____	_____
aestātis bonae	_____	_____
hōra longa (translate hōra with three different words)	_____	_____
bonum diem	_____	_____
spatiō longō	_____	_____
aetās bona	_____	_____
brevium diērum	_____	_____

Wordbank

longus, -a, -um long

brevis, -e short, brief

invidus, -a, -um envious, jealous

carpō, -ere, carpsī, carptum pluck, seize

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Keep This Grammar in Mind

COMMANDS USING THE SUBJUNCTIVE

Commands can be expressed several ways in Latin.

The one with which you are probably most familiar is the **imperative**, with *nōlī/nōlīte* + **infinitive** used for a negative command. (Remember, *nōlī* (singular) and *nōlīte* (plural) literally mean "Don't want!" hence the negative command, Don't --- (literally, "Don't want" to ---). However, sometimes "*nē*" is used with the imperative instead, especially in poetry.

Examples:

Positive Imperative

Carpe! Seize! (singular)

Carpite! Seize! (plural)

Negative Imperative

Nōlī carpere! Don't seize! (singular)

Nōlīte carpere! Don't seize! (plural)

Negative Imperative (especially in poetry)

Nē carpe! Don't seize! (singular)

Nē carpite! Don't seize! (plural)

(Note—Look ahead to **Keep This Grammar in Mind**, Commands, in *Odes* 1.9, p. 135, if you need practice with this more familiar way of expressing a command.)

Another very common way of expressing commands in Latin is with the jussive subjunctive. (Note—"jussive" comes from what Latin verb? What does it mean?)

In general, you will find the present subjunctive used for "positive" commands and "nē" plus the perfect subjunctive used for "negative" commands or "prohibitions."

Odes 1.11 has six commands, five in the subjunctive and only one in the imperative. This poem is filled with commands! Do you think Horace had a reason for singling out the only one that is in the imperative? This imperative, of course, is part of the Horatian phrase that has become famous and that can even be found on buttons sold by the publisher of this book! To what phrase are we referring?

Note: *Temptāris* is a syncopated (or shortened) form of *temptāveris*. *Quaesieris* is a syncopated form of *quaesiveris*.

[Syncope is the process by which a word is shortened through the dropping of letters or syllables from the middle of a word.]

Examples

Positive Jussive Subjunctive

temptēs Try! (singular) Another translation could be "May you try!"

temptētis Try! (plural)

Negative Jussive Subjunctive

nē quaesieris (singular) Don't seek!

nē quaesieritis (plural) Don't seek!

Now It's Your Turn**Exercise B**

Pick out the *subjunctive* form at the right that has the same meaning as the *English translation* at the left:

Example:

English	Latin choices	Answer
Seize!	(carpās, carpēs, carpis)	carpās
1. Be wise!	(sapis, sapiēs, sapiās)	_____
2. Strain!	(liquēs, liquābas, liquābis)	_____
3. Cut back!	(resecēs, resecās, resecētis)	_____
4. Seize!	(carpis, carpiēs, carpās)	_____
5. Seize!	(carpitis, carpiētis, carpātis)	_____
6. Don't seek!	nē (quaesieris, quaeris, quaeritis)	_____
7. Don't attempt!	nē (temptāritis, temptās, temptābis)	_____
8. Don't seize!	nē (carpis, carpitis, carpsaris)	_____

HELPING YOU TO READ WHAT HORACE WROTE

Vocabulary	Notes
<p>1. sciō, scīre, scīvī, scītum to know nefās, n. indecl., crime, offense against divine law, sacrilege</p>	<p>1. nē quaesieris Refer to the Keep This Grammar in Mind section above for <i>nē</i> plus the perfect subjunctive used to express a negative command.</p> <p>1–2. quem Remember that “<i>quem</i>” can be an interrogative pronoun, an interrogative adjective, or a relative pronoun. Which is it here? How does reading the whole clause help you to decide? Isn’t it the noun <i>finem</i> that makes you realize <i>quem</i> must be an adjective? Understand <i>finem</i> with each <i>quem</i>. This is an example of gapping. Your clue here is the repetition of <i>quem</i> with <i>mihi</i> and <i>tibi</i>, words that are parallel, i.e., both in the dative case.</p>
<p>2. Leuconoē, Leuconoēs, f. Leuconoe, woman’s name Babylōnius, -a, -um Babylonian</p>	<p>2. dī alternate form of <i>deī</i>, nominative plural of “<i>deus</i>,” “<i>gods</i>.” dederint perfect subjunctive in indirect question dependent on <i>quem finem</i>. Remember <i>quem</i> is an interrogative adjective here. If <i>dederint</i> is perfect tense, does it refer to action later than, earlier than, or the same time as the “command”? On indirect questions, see <i>Satires</i> 1.4 above, pp. 25–26. Leuconoē What case? nec equals “<i>et nē</i>” “and don’t.”</p>
<p>3. temptō, -āre, to try, attempt</p>	<p>2–3. Babylonian numbers; astrological tables predicting the future.</p> <p>3. temptāris = temptā(ve)ris This is the syncopated, or shortened, form of the verb. See Grammar to Keep in Mind above. ut Translate as “<i>how</i>.” melius comparative adjective, nominative singular neuter. Translate as “<i>better</i>.” Understand “<i>est</i>.” patī infinitive as nominative of the gerund or verbal noun. Translate “<i>to suffer</i>” or “<i>to endure</i>.” quidquid erit direct object of <i>patī</i></p>

Making Sense of It

First try reading the poem in this adapted version. Then move directly to the unchanged version that follows.

1. Tū nē quaesi(ve)eris (=nōlī quaerere) quem fīnem mihi, quem fīnem tibi
2. dī dederint, Leuconoē. scīre nefās (est). nec temptā(ve)ris (= et nōlī temptāre) Babylōniōs
3. numerōs. ut melius (est) patī quidquid erit!



HELPING YOU TO READ WHAT HORACE WROTE

Vocabulary

4. **hiems, hiemis**, f. winter, storm
tribuō, -ere, tribuī, tribūtum to allot, assign
5. **oppōnō, -ere, -posuī, -positum** to place against, place in front, especially put before someone for acceptance, proffer
dēbilitō, -āre to weaken
pūmex, pūmicis, m. pumice-stone
6. **Tyrrhēnus, -a, -um** Tyrrhenian, Etruscan
liquō, -āre to melt, strain
spatium, spatii, n. space, period of time
brevis, -e short, brief
7. **spēs, speī**, f. hope
resēcō, -āre, -secuī, -sectum, to cut back, prune, restrain
loquor, loquī, locūtus sum to speak
invidus, -a, -um envious, jealous
8. **aetās, aetātis**, f. time, age
carpō, -ere, carpsī, carptum pluck, seize
crēdulus, -a, -um credulous, trustful
posterus, -a, -um next, following, future, later

Notes

4. **seu . . . seu** Use this repeated conjunction to help you see the structure of the sentence and the parallel clauses. Translate: "Whether . . . or . . ." Pay attention to the gapped words. The first clause has subject and verb gapped (to be supplied from looking at the second clause); the second clause has the direct object gapped (to be supplied from the first clause). The gapped verb in the first clause could be a present or future form of the verb in the second clause.
- plūris = plurēs** third declension adjective alternate ending, masculine/feminine accusative plural
- tribuit** present or perfect tense (same form)
- ultimam** understand *hiemem*
5. **quae** relative pronoun. What is its antecedent? Remember, it will have to agree in number and gender.
- oppositis . . . pūmicibus** ablative of means "with its hostile pumice-stones." Note that the stones are what make the sea become weakened, not the reverse.
- 5–6. **mare Tyrrhēnum** direct object of *dēbilitat*
6. **sapiās . . . liquēs** jussive subjunctives. See **Grammar to Keep in Mind** above.
vīna plural for singular; translate "wine."
spatiō brevī best taken as a causal ablative. Translate as "because of the brief time." Understand after this phrase "of our lives" or "appropriate for our hopes."
7. **resēcēs** jussive subjunctive. See others on line 6.
fūgerit future perfect. Translate "will have fled."
8. **quam minimum** *quam* with the superlative (as . . . as possible). Translate "to the least extent possible" or "as little as possible."
crēdula takes dative, *posterō*.
posterō Understand the noun "*diēi*" with this adjective.

Making Sense of It (CONTINUED)

4. seu (Iuppiter) plūrīs hiemēs (tribuit), seu Iuppiter tribuit ultimam (hiemem),
5. quae nunc oppositīs pūmicibus mare
6. Tyrrhēnum dēbilitat: sapiās (=sape), vīna liquēs (=liquā) et spatiō brevī
7. spem longam resecēs (=resecā). dum loquimur, fūgerit invida
8. aetās: carpe diem, quam minimum crēdula posterō (diēi).



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Fig. #4 - *vīna liquēs et spatiō brevī/spem longam resecēs.*
(Odes 1.11.5–6)

WHAT HORACE ACTUALLY WROTE

Notes

1. **quaesieris** syncopated form of *quaesiveris*.
Understand “*est*” with *scīre nefās*. In the actual Latin, this phrase is parenthetical, “interrupting” the sentence.
3. **temptāris** syncopated form of *temptāveris*.
4. **hiemem** This is metonymy for “year.” (For a definition of metonymy, refer to section on *Satires* 1.4, p. 24). The sense of “winter” as a way of reckoning years, however, is significant for the theme of death that pervades the poem. Look ahead to *Odes* 1.9, where winter also leads to thoughts of what to enjoy in the moment.
6. **liquēs** Before drinking their wine, the Romans strained it to remove the sediment.
7. **invida** personifies time; *invida aetās* almost becomes a third party jealous of Leuconoe and the speaker.
8. **carpe diem** This Horatian phrase has become very famous. For poems in English that utilize the “carpe diem” theme, see Marvell’s “To his Coy Mistress,” and Herrick’s “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time.”
posterō Try understanding a word like “*virō*” instead of “*diē*”! See Gapping and Ambiguity section below.

As It Was

1. Tū nē quaesieris (scīre nefās), quem mihi, quem tibi
2. fīnem dī dederint, Leuconoē, nec Babylōniōs
3. temptāris numerōs. ut melius, quidquid erit, patī!
4. seu plūrīs hiemēs, seu tribuit Iuppiter ultimam,
5. quae nunc oppositīs debilitat pūmicibus mare
6. Tyrrhēnum: sapiās, vīna liquēs et spatiō brevī
7. spem longam resecēs. dum loquimur, fūgerit invida
8. aetās: carpe diem, quam minimum crēdula posterō.

AFTER READING WHAT HORACE WROTE

Personification

Time, "*aetās*," is personified in the poem when it is described as "jealous," "*invida*." Consider how this personification introduces the idea of a "third party" involved with the speaker and Leuconoe. When we reach the issue of "trust" in the poem's last line we may recall the "*puer*" in *Odes* 1.5, whose trust in Pyrrha seems dangerous to the speaker. How does "trust" operate in the present poem? See the next section on gapping and ambiguity.

Gapping and Ambiguity

In the adapted version of the poem, we supplied the gapped word "*diē*" in line 8. Since "*diem*" appears in the first part of the sentence, understanding "day" with "*posterō*" makes the simplest sense. (And this is how people generally take it.) Consider, though, what it would mean to understand another dative, singular masculine word instead: "*virō*." Might this be an ironic way for the speaker to suggest that Leuconoe should enjoy the moment with him because the next "man" (*posterō virō*) may not be so worthy of her trust?! You now know enough Latin to see how a Latin poet like Horace can use the flexibility of Latin to keep you contemplating more than one interpretation for his poem.

Time and Death

The "*carpe diem*" theme, which comes from this poem, encompasses time, the seasons, and even death. Think about why the notion of enjoying the moment might be juxtaposed with the notion of death. Look back to the poem to find the Latin words for "next," "last," and "more." Consider how these adjectives underscore the immediacy of the moment and the uncertainty of the future. What situations in your life make you consider the issue of "time"?