

CHAPTER III

"CARPE DIEM" AND THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE POET

III.1. CARPE DIEM

As we read poetry, we may observe that each poet has his own style, favourable topics, forms, etc. which make him different from the other poets. There are poets who like to write about nature, and some others prefer to write about other things such as life, religion, human being, society, tyranny, law, social interaction, social imbalance, etc. Certainly, their works may be recognized by their distinctiveness.

We may name some poets due to their distinguished characteristic like John Milton who is known as a religious poet, Robert Frost who shows obvious concern on nature as the theme of his poems, Percy Bysshe Shelley who disagrees with tyranny, and many others.

Such tendency happens with Robert Herrick (1591-1634) as well. Robert Herrick is, but not the only one, a poet who composed many religious poems; which seem to have relation with his position as a vicar. Yet, this cavalier poet is also noted as a poet who often reflects a Greek saying 'carpe diem' in some of his poems which, five of them, are analyzed in this thesis. To understand the content of the analysis and the rest of this thesis, the

following will clarify the term 'carpe diem' more thoroughly.

Etymologically, 'carpe diem' is a Latin saying which after being transferred into English means 'seize the day'. According to A hand Book to literature (Hugh, 1980) 'carpe diem' is:

.... 'seize the day'. The phrase was used by Horace and has come to be applied generally to literature, especially to lyric poems, which exemplify the spirit of "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die". The theme was a very common one in 16th and 17th century English love poetry (p. 68).

'Carpe diem' or 'seize the day' was in fact very popular among the lover-poets in 16th and 17th centuries. Not less than Sir John Suckling, Andrew Marvell, Richard Lovelace, and Robert Herrick implied 'carpe diem' as the theme of a number of their works.

.... lover-poets continually were exhorting their Mistresses to yield to love while they still had their youth and beauty, as in Robert Herrick's famous

Gather ye Rose-buds while ye may,
 old Time is still a flying:
 And this same flower that smiles to day,
 Tomorrow will be dying.

(Thrall, 1936: 68).

In a quick reading, 'carpe diem' in its position as the exemplification of 'Let's eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die' lead us to a thought presuming that this saying encourages us to be frivolous, consump-

tive, greedy, selfish, and overambitious. This thought can be tolerated because, somehow, people are free to interpret something based on their knowledge upon the subject as long as it is supported by relevant proves. Nevertheless, we must give a fair thought a portion in order to find the true meaning, or at least close enough to it, of the term. For such purpose, this thesis will view the term 'carpe diem' as a concept of using the valuable time of youth by doing constructive deeds. This thought is relied on the inevitable fact that life is short and so is youth itself.

It is necessary to explain about hedonism and epicureanism here as people tend to twist them with 'carpe diem'. The explanation is meant only to give a comparative study to the term 'carpe diem'.

The Dictionary of Literary Terms (Shaw, 1972) has an explanation for hedonism as quotes:

The belief and doctrine that pleasure and happiness are the highest and greatest goods which man can hope to attain. Hedonism also implies devotion to pleasure as way of life. Etymologically, the word 'hedonism' is derived from a Greek term meaning pleasure (p. 180).

Hedonism tends to exploit human being's mind and behaviour by means of legalizing the pursuit of pleasure as way of life. Nothing is more important than pleasure, not even religion or morality. Hedonists will do anything to obtain the fulfilment of their desire of pleasure. The

Dictionary of The English Language (Gove, 1986) emphasizes that '.... hedonism asserts that pleasure or happiness is the sole or chief good in life' and that '.... hedonism is a way of life based on or suggesting the principles of hedonism' (p. 1049).

Clearly, hedonism puts pleasure above all things. Life, it believes, is just for having fun, obtaining pleasure unlimitedly.

While epicureanism is an ethical doctrine firstly taught by Epicurus (342 - 270 BC). One footnote in Lord Byron's Don Juan explains that '....this doctrine taught that the greatest good was happiness, attained not by carnal pleasure, but by virtuous living that brought peace of mind (Steffan, 1986: 604).

'Carpe diem', as explained previously, looks at life as a short thread or a brief book meaning that life is really short. None can tell when or where someone will die since human being's doom is vague and death is unpredictable. Therefore, we must do something (and it means good things) to make that short term a worthy living. Just like what Horace means by 'carpe diem' as quoted in The Nuttal Dictionary of Quotations (Wood, 1970) that we must "make a good use of the present" (p.36). So, shortness of life term and youth likewise are the prominent reasons of the so called 'carpe diem'.

III.2. THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE POET

Robert Herrick (1591-1674) was the seventh child of a Leicestershire man, Nicholas Herrick, who was settled in London as a goldsmith in Wood Street, Cheapside. The poet was baptized at St. Vedast's church in Foster Lane, on the 24th of August 1591. When he was an infant, his father died of the effects of a fall from a window. Robert was apprenticed in 1607 to his uncle, Sir William Herrick, the king's jeweller, and little is known about the young Herrick's life at this time. But he seems to have given up his apprenticeship because after six years, in 1614, at the late of age twenty-three, he went up to St. John College, Cambridge, as a fellow commoner. He moved over to Trinity Hall, and took his degree of M.A. in 1620. Then he returned to London, where he mixed with the writers and artists of the day, notably Ben Jonson and Henry Lawes, and enjoyed the patronage of Endymion Porter.

Herrick became known as a poet during that period though he published none of his works (his poems circulated only in manuscript), at some time between 1623 and 1625 he took holy orders and was chaplain to Buckingham's expedition to the Ile de Re. In 1629 the king appointed him to the living of Dean Prior in the diocese of Exeter, and he settled down to the life of a parish priest. The best of Herrick's work was written during the calm existence of the next eighteen years.

Events in England, however, were to disrupt his life and upon his refusal to subscribe to the Solemn League Covenant (for the further reform of the church on Presbyterian lines) he was ejected from his living. He returned to London and was probably supported by his relatives until 1662, when the restored king, Charles II, reinstated him. He spent the remainder of his life in his parish and died in 1674, a bachelor of eighty-three.

Herrick's settlement in Devonshire seems to be unpleasant for him as reflected in some of his works:

Some of Herrick's poems, notably 'To Dean-bourn' and 'His returne to London', suggest that he was often bored and wretched in Devonshire, which he elsewhere terms 'dull' and 'loathed' (Press, 1961: 7).

Though a few of his poems were printed and circulated during his first period in Devon, his principal collection was not published until 1648, a year after he was turned out of Dean Prior. The title, *Hesperides, or the works, both Humane and Divine of Robert Herrick, Esq,* glances back to his home in the West Country, and the book contains his religious verse under a separate title page, *Noble Numbers*, dated in 1647. This is Herrick's solitary book.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS : THE REFLECTION OF "CARPE DIEM" AS SEEN IN SOME OF ROBERT HERRICK'S POEMS