

A Comparative study of Shakespeare and Hafiz's sonnets, based on the Horace's motif of Carpe Diem

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Abstract- *Carpe Diem* which means “enjoy, seize, use, and make use of” is a term taken from ode I. XI of Horace and has become a very common motif in literature ever since. Many poets throughout history have used this motif. But what are the main tenets of the motif in Horace's odes? This article tries to show the main tenets of *Carpe Diem* according to Horace. These tenets are: tomorrow, living in the present and drinking wine; we try to apply the discussed elements on two sonnets of the greatest sonneteers of all times in two different countries. That of England's William Shakespeare's sonnet 73 and that of Persia's Hafiz's sonnet 473; we strive to see to what extent time has affected the concept of *Carpe Diem* in the poems; and to what extent the sonnets of Shakespeare and Hafiz followed the pattern of Horace's *Carpe Diem*.

Keywords- *Carpe Diem*; Hafiz; Shakespeare; Horace

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Carpe Diem

Known as a Greek aphorism, the literal translation of *Carpe Diem* by Conington¹ is “Seize the present.” It can also mean “enjoy, seize, use, make use of” (Perseus.tufts.edu, n.d.). Basically the word has its roots on the Epicurean ideas of Horace. Epicureans believe “pleasure” is the greatest good, but the method to reach pleasure is to live discreetly and to gain acquaintance with both the mechanisms of the world and the limitations of one's desires. This, according to Epicurus, leads one to reach the state of *ataraxia* (tranquility), a kind of freedom from fear, and *aponia* (an absence of pain within body). The mixture of *ataraxia* and *aponia* is supposed to create happiness in its highest form. However one critical point to remember is the fact that Epicurus also considered cautiousness an important virtue and stated that excess and overindulgence are the factors which will prevent reaching *ataraxia* and will bring losing *aponia*. According to this philosophy of Epicurus, and in consideration of time factor, Horace brings on the idea of *Carpe Diem*.

2. HORACE AND CARPE DIEM

Horace is the word Horace himself used as a pun for his name Horatius in his satires, due to the *Carpe Diem* philosophy he deemed very important. But how his *Carpe Diem* came into being? Although it is said that his father was a Venetian war slave who had been captured by Romans during the social wars, Horace himself declares

that he was a free born person (Kiernan, 1999, p.24). In satire 1.6.86 he mentions that he was the son of a ‘coactor argentarius’ (Fraenkel, 1957, pp. 4–5) or an auctioneer who buys the goods from the seller and then sells them with interest to the buyer. The person who probably had the most impression on him throughout his life was his father, as he says in satire 1.6:

*“Still, if my character's flawed by only a few little
Faults, and otherwise sound, just as you'd
censure
Perhaps the blemishes scattered over a noble
body:
And if no one can accuse me in fairness of greed,
Meanness, debauchery, if in truth, in my own
praise,
I live purely, innocently, loved by my friends:
It's due to my father”*

As his debut on his father's continues, he mentions the poorness of the father and how he endured lots of hardships so that his son could prosper and be a successful person. It is most probably after the death of this most beloved father that Horace goes to Athens. There, he enrolls in the academy which was founded by Plato and at the moment was controlled by Epicureans (Kiernan, 1999, p. 25). Epicureans believed in pleasures within the norms and by the time Horace entered the academy they had become the dominant voice; it was this dominance of Epicure's ideas at the academy which made a very deep impression on the now 19 years old Horace, who had spent a different life from the affluent people who surrounded him in those high level institutes. This different life from his mates has impressed him with the idea of seizing the day. An impression which later was shown in Ode I, xi, where he says sentences like “*Tyrrhenum: sapias, vina*

¹ John Conington is the translator of 1882 edition of The Odes and Carmen Saeculare of Horace.

liques et spatio brevi”² or his famous: “Carpe Diem quam minimum credula postero;”³ where he literally mentions Carpe Diem.

It is later in his ode III, xxix that he starts elaborating on Carpe diem; and the outcome of comparing this latter ode with his first one will give us the three main tenets of Carpe Diem. Within the elaboration of Carpe Diem in the ode III, xxix and in the lines of Ode I.XI where he mentions Carpe Diem there are three important factor which can be counted as the main tenets of Carpe Diem. These three are: future, present and wine.

2.1 Horace and Future

In both odes I.XI and III.xxix Horace mentions future. His disbelief in future is so potent that it comes even before his advocacy of living in the present. In ode I.XI, his first word is “not to ask what our destined term of years is”, for as he mentions discreetly, it is the forbidden knowledge. He goes on to say do not even look into seers’ tablets and do not search for the meaning of the unknown future. And then he heeds the auditor not to care for how many more years they will be granted.

“Tu ne quaesieris, scire nefas, quem mihi, quem tibi finem di dederint, Leuconoe, nec Babylonios temptaris numeros. ut melius, quidquid erit, pati. seu pluris hiemes seu tribuit Iuppiter ultimam,”⁴

But why is his disbelief in future this potent? The answer simply is that the future is unknown. The number of the years one can live is unknown, as he literally mentions in the fourth line of the first quatrain of ode I.XI and maybe this is the last day.

“seu pluris hiemes seu tribuit Iuppiter ultimam,”⁵

In his Ode II.XXIX he once again mentions the importance of disbelief in the unknown future by saying that the gods have veiled the future from us. And to mention the cruelty of the future and the gods he says that the gods are laughing at us.

“prudens futuri temporis exitum caliginosa nocte premit deus ridetque, si mortalis ultra fas trepidat.”⁶

2 (“Strain your wine and prove your wisdom; life is short; should hope be more?”)(Conington. Horace. The Odes and Carmen Saeculare of Horace. 1882))

3 (“Seize the present; trust tomorrow e’en as little as you may.” (The same))

4 Ask not (’tis forbidden knowledge), what our destined term of years,

Mine and yours; nor scan the tables of your Babylonish seers.

Better far to bear the future, my Leuconoe, like the past,

Whether Jove has many winters yet to give, or this our last;

5 Whether Jove has many winters yet to give, or this our last

6 The issue of the time to be

Heaven wisely hides in blackest night,

And laughs, should man's anxiety

Transgress the bounds of man's short sight.

His mentioning of future is not to believe in it for it is unknown and his belief is that the gods themselves had veiled it from us. Therefore it should not be heeded for it is a trifle endeavor.

2.2 Horace and Living in the present

Although Carpe Diem means seizing the day and it is only logical to think that Horace’s intention was to bring upon us this message; an interesting point in both his odes is that he brings up this advice only after he references to the future first. This, of course differs from the main idea behind Carpe Diem. Carpe Diem, meaning seize the day has its main pressure in the present. But why has Horace brought the future which is less important than the present first? The answer is pretty simple. To enjoy the present the most, one should forget the future and do not think about it at all. Future, according to Horace, is better to be forgotten like past⁷ and not thought about if one wishes to Carpe Diem. He first tries to calm the mind of the auditor from the worries of future as it is only plausible that besides the regret of past, it is mostly the fright of future which steals the present from the people.

Now his second factor, the present, is filled with his epicurean ideology whereas he mentions the life of present to be filled with simplicity, and pleasures of worldly comfort. He mentions the time of present should be lived in harmony, happiness and all the past, or the future should be forgotten. Living in the present is the utmost important tenet of Horace’s Carpe Diem.

2.3 Horace and Drinking wine

Although this could be for his epicurean idea of moderation that Horace never did devote an entire ode to the wine, But writing about it can often be seen in most of Horace’s works. Nevertheless, the man we are talking about is “the man who is at his deathbed who had a far greater sadness than losing his wife; and that was departing from his most beloved wine” (Johnson, 1989, p.68). Therefore, it is very well imaginable that his Carpe Diem odes would have been derived of mentioning of wine. He mentions it, yes, but how he mentions wine in his odes is of significance too. In ode I.XI he just brings wine after his advice of wisdom: “Be wise, Strain your wines”⁸ and well, the wisdom behind making wine is of course shortness of life. And in his ode III.XXIX his mentioning of wine comes with a kind of luring description of an excellent scenery filled with roses and flowers, and his wine is a mellow one in an unbroached casks.

“non ante verso lene merum cado cum flore, Maecenas, rosarum et pressa tuis balanus capillis”

3. HĀFEZ AND CARPE DIEM

Khwāja Shams-ud-Dīn Muhammad Hāfez-e Shīrāzī, known by his pen name as Hāfez was one of the greatest

7 Better far to bear the future, my Leuconoe, like the past

8 sapias, vina liques

sonneteers of Persia who lived in fourteenth century. His collected works or *Divan-e-Hafez* is counted as the summit of Persian poetry. Hafiz's reputation has flown from Iran to America as Ralph Waldo Emerson said about him: "Hafiz is the prince of Persian poets, and in his extraordinary gifts adds to some of the attributes of Pindar, Anacreon, Horace, and Burns the insight of a mystic, that sometimes affords a deeper glance at Nature than belongs to either of these bards. He accosts all topics with an easy audacity" (Emerson, n.d.). Themes of Carpe Diem can be abundantly found in his sonnets. The sonnet which was chosen for this comparative article is his sonnet number 473, "heed the time as much as you can" and it has been translated to English by the author of the article. All three tenets of Horace's Carpe Diem will be discussed on the poem to see if it has them or not.

3.1 Hafiz and Present

Being the most essential part of the philosophy of Carpe Diem, Hafiz's sonnet, unlike that of Horace, starts with the importance of present. He presents us with one critical advice in the beginning of his sonnet and that is to heed the time as much as one can. Then once again and unlike Horace, he advises people to remember the outcome of life. He does not go into the unknown future yet. A very important note is that he uses the words "غنیمت وقت" which is almost the literal translation of Carpe Diem and is the word which is used in Persian for the term "Carpe Diem."

*"Heed the time (Carpe Diem) as much as you can
For outcome of life is just this moment, if you know"⁹*

In Hafiz's point of view, one group of those who have this present in their hands, and enjoying it, are lovers. He advises the auditor to be like lovers and enter the world from the door of joy and forget about all the earthly matters for none of them are worth losing time and life for.

*"Hear the counsel of the lovers, and come back
from the door of joy
For occupations of this mortal world is not worth
it at all."¹⁰*

3.2 Hafiz and Future

Not only Hafiz did not start his argumentation of Carpe Diem through disbelief in the unknown future, but also his glance at future is by far different from Horace. In Horace's point of view one should not heed future for it is completely unknown, but in Hafiz's point of view one should not heed future for it will rob your present from you. In the second line of sonnet 473, he versifies this fact that although the time may bring happiness for you, but it takes the precious life away; So one should try their best, and even fight to get their share of happiness from the present.

"Time is the price you pay to reach contentment

وقت را غنیمت دان آن قدر که بتوانی
حاصل از حیات ای جان این دم است تا دانی
10 Translation to English by the Author

*Try to the right of happiness from fortune even
with fight"¹¹*

Then later on, his mentioning of future turns in another way. In the fourth line of the sonnet he says that after drinking wine for the first time, the regret and remorse of not drinking wine his whole life will kill the Ascetic. Therefore he asks those who are wise, not to do something which may bring them sadness and remorse, and drink wine and enjoy the present. It is a point which transcends us to the third part of Hafiz's Carpe Diem; Hafiz and Wine.

*"The delight of wine will kill the regretful Ascetic
O sage do not do a thing which brings you
regret"¹²*

3.3 Hafiz and Wine

Although Hafiz got his pen name for knowing the Quran in 14 different methods, and as a Muslim it was prohibited for him to drink wine; but wine is still a main tenet of his Carpe Diem. As mentioned above, his belief is that those who do not get intoxicated by the wine will regret the lost life without wine as they taste it for the first time. He then goes on even to the point to say that although one of the Muhtasib's¹³ jobs is to break wine barrels and destroy them, he is oblivious to the fact that the sufi¹⁴ who is a very high ranked Muslim ascetic has hidden ruby red homemade wine in his cellars.

*"Muhtasib doesn't know enough that the Sufi,
Has aged a homemade wine which is like
pomegranate ruby"*

His belief is that even the sufi lives the present and drinks wine to pass a better life for wine will make all happy.

4. SHAKESPEARE AND CARPE DIEM

Like water will boil in hundred centigrade Celsius, Shakespeare's being the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist is a widely known fact; a fact which Greenblatt, Bevington and Well, three of the most renowned scholars of Shakespeare in our time found significant enough to point to in their books. Shakespeare was baptized on 26 April 1564 and passed away on 23 April 1616. In his life time he managed to write approximately 38 plays, 154 sonnets and 2 long narrative poems, either collaboratively or on his own. In 1609 he published *The Sonnets* which was the last non dramatic work of his which was published in his life time. "Although some scholars believe that the poems in his book were published in the order Shakespeare himself wished them to be" (Schoenbaum 1987, p.268), yet none

کام بخشی گردون عمر در عوض دارد
جهد کن که از دولت داد عیش بستانی
زاهد پشیمان را ذوق باده خواهد کشت
عقلا مکن کاری کآورد پشیمانی

13 A muhtasib (Arabic: محتسب) was a supervisor of bazaars and trade in the medieval Islamic countries. His duty was to ensure that public business was conducted in accordance with the law of sharia.

14 A member of an ascetic, mystical Muslim sect.

of the Shakespeare's scholars are certain on what year those sonnets have been written or in what order. However, what they are almost unanimously sure about is that the poems were written for private readership. The sonnets follow two main lines, one in the pursuit of a powerful lust toward a married lady, or the "dark lady" and the other is toward a young man or the "fair youth." It is mostly his second line of sonnets or the ones about the "Fair youth" whom he is constantly warning of tarred future, of oldness, heeding to get married soon and not postponing thing to the future that will be useful for our study. Among those sonnets sonnet 73 has been chosen as one of them which has the factors of Carpe Diem inside and we will try to see whether it has followed all the three main tenets of Horace's Carpe Diem or not.

4.1. Shakespeare and Future

Comparing Horace, Hafiz and Shakespeare, in the matter of whether bringing the future in the beginning of the poem or after the mentioning of present, Shakespeare is like Horace, as he brings his argumentation of future in the beginning of his poem. However, unlike Horace his future is not unknown and unlike Hafiz his future is not an unworthy one. Shakespeare's cautionary advice of the future to his auditor is like a well-lit road and yet it is a descriptive, imaginative and far more surprising. He stands as a mirror in front of the auditor and tells the auditor to look at him in his present state; the miserable state of old age he is in; and then he heeds the young man that this is what he shall become in the future:

*"That time of year thou may'st in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds
sang.
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day,
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by-and-by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by."*

As a master of versification and imagery in sonnets, his exquisite warnings to the auditor about the future come in these three couplets. He starts with this fact that he is now old, and heeds the auditor that as you can see me, I am like a bough which is losing its leaves. And he reminds him that it was not very far from when he had his time of energy and happiness. Then he goes on, describing himself as the twilight of a day and the darkness which befalls at night. And at last for his argumentation he brings the third couplet which compares Shakespeare with a burning log whose own ashes are now sitting on him and putting him out. He therefore tries to show the future which brings old age with itself and warns the "fair youth" that this is what the future will also bring to him. The true master of

language with an exquisite language shows the future part in Carpe Diem.

4.2 Shakespeare and Present

Present comes in Shakespeare's Carpe Diem and it comes in his own method. Horace showed the good things one can do at the present. Hafiz says that only present is the outcome of life. And Shakespeare brings the present after he showed a bleak future. Now that he has shown the truth about old age to the auditor, he tells him to enjoy life more, make your love stronger and love what you love now more potentially for the future will steal everything from you.

*"This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more
strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long"*

4.3 Shakespeare and Wine

Although it was Shakespeare himself who in his Coriolanus said: "I am known to be a humorous patrician, and one that loves a cup of hot wine with not a drop of allaying Tiber in't; said to be something imperfect in favoring the first complaint; hasty and tinder-like upon too trivial motion; one that converses more with the buttock of the night than with the forehead of the morning," (Shakespeare & Wilson, 2009, p.34) but unfortunately the wine factor is absent in his sonnets. Whether it was for his sonnets were for a private audience and mainly toward the "fair youth" to make him get married sooner and wine was not a very appropriate matter to be taught or any other reasons; the important fact is that his Carpe diem poetry does not completely follow the Horace's main three tenets of Carpe Diem.

5. CONCLUSION

Carpe Diem or seize the day which was first mentioned in Horace's ode I.XI and later was elaborated in his ode III.XXXI has become a well-used motif ever since. Although this phrase's main philosophy is to just being in the present and enjoying it, in Horace's poetry this motif has three main tenets which are: Future (a common disbelief toward the future), Present, and wine. These three tenets became widely known; among poets of other countries, there were poets like Hafiz and Shakespeare who have used them as the basis of their sonnets. As we discussed above, Hafiz exploits all the three elements of Horace's carpe diem; even though these elements do not coincide with Horace's elements. Moreover, Shakespeare's motif of Carpe diem lacks the component of wine, while the two other sonneteers did easily take for granted such a concept.

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