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CARPE DIEM THE IDEA OF "CARPE DIEM" IN THE POETRY OF THE ARAB POET YAHIYA UMAR AND THE ENGLISH ROBERT HERRICK A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT:

This research paper compares two poems dealing with the idea of "Carpe Diem" that means "seize the day". The poems are composed by two famous poets: the British lyricist Robert Herrick (1591-1674) from the seventeenth-century, and the Lahjjan Arab lyrical popular poet Yahiya Omar from the eighteenth century (died 1754). It shows how the two classic poets from different culture dealt with the Latin idea "Carpe Diem".

At the level of this idea, the glorified songwriters the Arab Yahiya Omar meets with the English Robert Herrick inviting young people to seize the time. The Latin idea runs in most of their poetry to warn younger girls and boys not to waste the most precious commodities of life: time, youth and love. It walks direct and joyful in Omar's poem, but serious and covered with symbols and metaphors in the lines of Herrick.

Keywords: Hesperides, Arabia, Lahj, Yafia', Hadramout, Yemen, Baroda, Abu Mua'jib,

INTRODUCTION:

Man has experienced life and concluded that it is short and mortal. So that thinkers and poets went urge and incite 'virgins' to "Seize the day", to pluck the opportunity of life and not to waste its most precious commodities: time, youth and love.

"Carpe diem" is a Latin aphorism literally means "Seize the day". It was first used by the Roman poet Horace to express the idea that one should enjoy life, to live his fleeting dreams by embracing its pleasures. Horace's full advice, "*carpe diem quam minimum credulapostero,*" can be translated as "pluck the day, trusting as little as possible in the next one," but carpe diem alone has come to be used as shorthand for this entire idea, which is more widely known as "seize the day".

The Latin idea was popularized in English love poems of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: Spencer's "*Faerie Queen*", Marvel's "*To His Coy Mistress*", Fitzgerald's translation of "*The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*", and in Robert Herrick's "*To the Virgins, To Take Much of Time*".

Then the idea "*Carpe diem*" was received by many who came after them, but its meaning came out from the circle of love to other fields of life that the Latin idea "Seize the day" has become a popular motto for undesirable behavior. One should enjoy life as well as he can but give very little trust in tomorrow that repeat the pre-Islamic Arab Bedouins' motto where an Arab would milk his camel whenever she gives birth, because there is no safety for tomorrow in his eyes.⁽¹⁾

At the level of this idea, the popular Arab poet Yahiya Omar from the eighteenth century (d. 1754) meets with the Englishman Robert Herrick (1591-1674) of the seventeenth century. Both of them are glorified songwriters. The Latin idea runs in most of their poetry, warning not to waste the most precious commodities of life: time, youth and love. It runs in most of their poetry; joyful in Omar's poem, but serious and covered with symbols and metaphors in the lines of Herrick.

BRIEF LIFE SKETCH OF THE TWO POETS:

1. Robert Herrick (1591-1674) is an English poet and clergyman. He lived in Westminster. His *Hesperides*, published in 1648, contained about 1,200 poems, mostly very short epigrams, love poetry and folk songs. He possessed a great lyrical facility and was an apt and charming exponent of the Horacian way of life. His work subsequently appeared in miscellaneous and wrote love songs. Some of his songs were set by the seventeenth-century English composer Henry Laws and others.⁽²⁾ The English critic Swinburne described Herrick as "the greatest English songwriter."⁽³⁾

2. Yahiya Omar Al Yafei (d. 1754) nicknamed (Abu Mua'jib) is a famous popular song poet of the 18th century. He was born in Yafa'. Lahj Governorate, Yemen. He moved on ships from Aden to Hadramout, and frequented the Gulf, from which he immigrated to India. He visited Hyderabad, Madras, and Calcutta, then to Baroda Emirate.⁽⁴⁾ In Baroda he settled with a Hadramouti community and got married, and died there.

Yahiya was playing his songs on the Lute (Al-Qanboos). He gained wide fame in Yemen, Arabia and the Gulf. His poetry is greatly desired and loved for its simplicity, musicality and fun.

AGHNAM ZAMANAK: SEIZE THE DAY:

In Robert Herrick's "*To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time*," the speaker is advising young women to marry while they are still young and capable of attracting a mate. He believes that the stage of youth is the best :

Gather ye Rose-buds while ye may,
Old Time is still a flying:

¹Abboud, Maroon. *The Heads*. 1975. P. 11

²Eagle, Dorothy, ed. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Literature*. P.261

³Swinburne, Algernon C, *Studies in Prose and Poetry*. (London, 1894), P. 45.

⁴**Baroda** was the capital of an Indian emirate known today as Vadodara. It was established as an emirate in 1721 AD and its relationship with Britain (East India Company) was via a resident in Baroda. On 1949 it accessioned to the Indian Union, and today it is part of the state of Gujarat.

And this same flower that smiles to day,
To morrow will be dying.

Omar opens his poem presenting an advice to his beloved to seize her time/her safety, to make much of time at the age of youth where blood running in her veins is still warm:

أغرم زمانك أماتك يا حبيب أغرم * ما دام عادك صغير السن طيشاني
خايف عليك بعد ستعشر سنة تندم * تنسى شبابك وأحبابك وتنساني

(Seize your time, your safety, my beloved, take advantage of it *

As long as you are young and reckless

I am afraid for you, after sixteen years you will regret *

Forget your youth and your loved ones and forget me)

Both are excellent songwriters: Yahiya Omar composes songs, set melodies and performs them on his Qamboos instrument. He was the most famous songwriter in all Arabia. And Herrick, as the English critic Swinburne qualifies him was "the greatest English songwriter ever". Despite his use of classic allusions, symbols and metaphors, Herrick's poems are easier to understand for contemporary readers than those of many among his contemporaries. In his poetry, as Moran says: "He speaks of the normal sensual man."

Herrick was an academic, minister, chaplain, poet and devoted admirer of Ben Jonson's. He expressed the idea of "carpe diem" "seize the day" metaphorically by collecting roses, and in the image of roses is a symbol of earthly pleasures. As plants, they are tied to the cycles of nature and represent change and the transience of life. Like the "virgins," the roses are buds, fresh, youthful and brimming with life; youth, fragrance and joy. They flourish and smile today and die the next day. He speaks of the shortness of life and its demise at the speed of sunset; therefore he advises to seize time in youth. At the conclusion of his poem, he urged virgins to seize the opportunity of a life time through marriage "And while ye may, go marry".

As for Abu Mua'jib, he was a soldier, an illiterate merchant, and a vernacular poet who knew nothing of the Latin idea. Neither did he read Horace or Herrick nor heard about the story of Ben Jonson's buried in an upright position. He was a traveling merchant and a talented poet roaming the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean carrying his Qamboos and cloth materials. His songs shone colorful lights on the surface of the salty water: on the coasts of Aden, Bahrain, Kuwait, Hyderabad, Calcutta and the Emirate of Baroda in India. His melodies had delighted the listeners everywhere he passed. The suffering of the human poet is the same, whether eastern or western, and the quarry of the people of love is the same one. So when one reads Omar's poem, he finds it as if it were a wonderful poetic translation of the content of Herrick's poem.

People who live on the coasts definitely have wide imagination and freedom. Herrick is the

son of the British Isles, and Yahiya Omar is the son of Aden, the famous coastal town of the Arabian Sea, and a wandering marine merchant on the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. Despite their different cultures, eastern and western, the sea water had brought them together on the deck of one idea: "Seize your time."

Both have the same purpose in the two poems, but the popular Arab poet did not have the academy and the experience of the minister and priest Herrick. Yahiya is direct, simple, smiling, and a 'merchant', and Herrick, due to his academic, political and religious position, takes refuge behind symbol, allusion and metaphor,

The glorious Lamp of Heaven, the Sun, 5
The higher he's a getting;
The sooner will his Race be run,
And neerer he's to Setting.

Both of them like to meet the beloved and win her sweet saliva and youth, so that, the 'unmarried' Herrick sets the Latin idea into 16 rhymed lines, whereas the 'married' Yahiya Omar summarized it in five lines of verse, and could condense it into two words: "Your time, your safety," and he prevailed:

أغتم زمانك أمانك يا حبيب أغتم * ما دام عادك صغير السن طيشاتي

(Seize your time, your safety, my beloved, take advantage of it *

As long as you are young and reckless)

Herrick called on the virgins (men and women) of his country to marry and take advantage of life at the age of youth,

That Age is best, which is the first
When Youth and Blood are warmer; 10
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times, still succeed the former.

and Yahiya Omar translated it thus "as long as you are young and reckless;" that the indiscretion that leads one to seize the present moment fully: "As long as you are young and reckless".

The invitation of the married Arab poet was mainly personal, whereas the unmarried English minister as Moran says: "urges those in their youth to actively celebrate life and its pleasures; however, the speaker does not urge "the virgins" simply to frolic adulterously, but to seek union in matrimony, thereby uniting the natural cycles of life and death with the rites and ceremonies of Christian worship."⁽⁵⁾ He assures the Latin idea in his another poem "Best to Be Merry":

⁵Daniel, Moran."Critical Essay on "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time," in" *Poetry for Students*", The Gale Group, 2001

Fools are they, who never know
 How the times away do go;
 But for us, who wisely see
 Where the bounds of Black Death be,
 Let's live merrily, and thus
 Gratify the Genius".

'The English Horace' walks on the lines of his verse a British royal walk that the reader can touch calmness, sobriety, symbol and equivocation; as for the Lahjjan cloth merchant there is no frown or concealment in his marching, but rather clarity, joy, and smile.

Like Herrick, Yahiya also believes that the most precious commodities of life: time, youth, and love must not be wasted. He entered the market of love and addresses the pretty girl in the language of Lahjjan buyer who, when buying something checks, assays and flips it too much, and asks for one "jaba" free to taste before buying. "Jaba" in our dialect means free as zakat (alms); so his beloved should pay zakat for her orchard and feed the passerby from her chest and lips:

الليم اللي بصدرك قل لنا من كم؟ * وارمي بحبة جَبَا يقرّة أعياني

The orange in your chest, tell us how much coast? *

Throw a pill for free, Oh, my darling!

In addition to the orange Yahiya Omar asks for little from lip-honey:

Oh, that honey in your lips, let us taste:

ياللي العسل في شفائك خذنا نطعم * ياللي شفائك عسل حاليوشي ° ثاني

(O you who have honey in your lips, allow us to taste*⁶)

Oh my love your lips are sweet honey and something else sweetest)

In "let us taste" in plural –Omar supports Herrick's call.

By nature the soldier and merchant, who brings material clothes from Baroda, in another song is bargaining even in love:

يقول يحيى عمر من كم * هذا العسل نشترى قفلة
 جردان يقطر من المبسم * ذا قِرش ، أدّي لنا وصلة

(Yahiya Omar says how much does "qafila"⁽⁶⁾ from this honey cost?

A Jardani⁽⁷⁾ honey is dripping from your lips * This is a piaster, give me a piece)

At the sea of love Yahiya had lost the directions, and the sea looked to him like a ring; so he could not know in which town of his Arab homeland he was:

من عجبتي فيك نظرت البحر كالخاتم * ولا اعترّف لي أنا في أيّ الأوطان

(Because I was amazed of your beauty, I saw the sea as a ring, *

And could not recognize in which homeland I was)

⁶Qafilah; a metal bowl for storing honey.

⁷Jardani: best kind of honey related to Jardan village in Shabowa, South Yemen

Thus, Just as Herrick connects nature and its variables with human life to express his views, warning that everything in Nature dies and advising the most beautiful element of nature (woman) to seize the time, Yahiya Omar uses fruits, honey and the sea surrounds him like a ring on a finger.

To conclude, Herrick began with a conventional remark urging listeners to "seize the day" by giving up their virginity; yet he recommends that they accomplish this only through marriage. And, Omar opens his poem advising his beloved to take advantage of her time, for "one's time, his safety". He incites her not to waste the most precious commodities of life time, youth and love.

The two poets meet at the "Carpe Diem" idea, and the reader can see Herrick as serious, metaphorical and learned, whereas Yahiya as smiling, direct and more sensual. In the last stanza, Herrick urges the virgins to pursue love and the "natural" union of matrimony that ensues within the Christian world by marriage; and the Arab poet meets with the 'English Horace' in dealing with the concept of (Carpe Diem), and the 'tone' is the same tone.

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