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“To love while you can”---An Analysis of the Poems in Carpe Diem

According to the original Latin poem, Carpe Diem expresses a philosophy of recognizing the brevity of life and seizing an opportunity in time. This article will analyze four poems in Carpe Diem, “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time” by Robert Herrick, “Go, Lovely Rose” by Edmund Waller “Song to Celia” by Ben Jonson and “In Princess: Now Sleeps The Crimson Petal” by Alfred Lord Tennyson. All of these poems express the fleeting nature of life and emphasize that the young should chase the joy of love. The basic argument in all the following poems is that young maidens should cherish their youth. Otherwise they will lose appeal at their age. These poems, to some extent, reveal a hidden sensual connotation that encourages people to enjoy the pleasure of being in love and having sex.

All that four poems state the central thesis in a concise and clear way but convey deep emotions. “To love while you can” is the main message indicated in the first stanza of Robert Herrick’s poem, “Gather ye rose-buds while ye may, /Old time is still a-flying: /And this same flower that smiles to-day, /To-morrow will be dying” (1-4). This stanza mainly focuses on fleeting time. Here maidens are compared to rosebuds whose youths are figuratively as short as flowers. Because life is so short, the poet then states that maidens should spend time in enjoying sex. On the one hand, the poet addresses the youthful nature of girls. On the other hand, youth goes so quickly that old age and death are both imminent and inevitable.

Similarly, the same worry that a girl's youth and beauty may soon disappear is also expressed in "Go, Lovely Rose." For example in these lines: "Tell her that's young /and shuns to have her graces spied /that hadst thou sprung in deserts where no men abide /Thou must have uncommented died" (4-8). In this poem, the poet is talking to a personified rose. By telling the rose to talk to the girl, the poet actually wants to tell the girl fondly that though she still appears sweet and fair, she wastes her time on loitering around shyly but not enjoying love and his admire. The poet sighs that the girl is like a rose in desert. If the rose had grown in a desert with no people's attention, that the rose would have died without ever being praised for its beauty. This might be a sensual hint to express poet's belief that if the girl were not too shy, they could have already enjoyed the beauty of love. In his heart, hidden beauty is worth little, which is like leaving rose in wilderness. The poet wants to tell the girl to come forth, ignoring her shyness so that her beauty can be desired. And he also tells her not to blush as he admires her. By telling the rose to die in front of her, he wants the girl to recognize that she will see that just as with all rare things: the time of her sweetness and fairness will be short lived.

The main ideas of love can also be found in "Song to Celia." It describes how love is like strong wine, and that loving the girl Celia is like getting drunk. The poet asks only for a pledge, a loving look, from Celia's eyes that he promises to return in kind. Even better to him, if she will "leave a kiss but in the cup" meaning to pledge a kiss, he will forget about wine but only her love. In this poem, the poet expresses that the pleasures of Celia's love are a more profound intoxication, a greater sensual delight, than alcohol.

"Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal" is a little different from the above-mentioned three poems. Its language is more implicit. Without clearly stating that girls shall cherish their youth and to love while they can, the author draws a beautiful painting of love. People could not openly

speaking about the joy of love but using symbolism, which is not sex but feelings about love. The use of indirect allusion rather than direct description enhances the erotic effect. What can be more erotic than reading this poem to the girl someone loves. The more implicit and ambiguous the language is, the more imagination and sexual fantasy can be imposed.

The first and second stanzas of “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time” use a variety of literary devices to help express and strengthen the subject of love such as metaphor, personification and rhyme. At the beginning, Herrick speaks of seizing the chance to “gather ye rosebuds” in regard of their dying in a day. Obviously, the “rosebuds” represent the beauty, which indicates that beauty fades away as time goes by. Or they refer to girls who are like rosebuds and will blossom soon. Then he turns his eyes to the sky, comparing “the sun” to “the glorious lamp of heaven”(5). While “the higher he is a-getting the sooner will his race be run, and nearer he is to setting” (6-8). We learn that how short life is through the portrayal of the sun.

Next, in the third stanza, “times” (10) are personified in the victory over “youth”(10), which reveals that our youth is valuable. “Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal” abounds with metaphors and personifications. The title of the poem is “The Princess: Now sleeps the Crimson Petal.” Tennyson says in the first line, ‘Oh, my love’s like a red red rose.’ By personifying in metaphorical form he identifies his sleeping Princess with the crimson petal of a red rose. Is this love for an ideal love or is it a paternal love is at times difficult to grasp. He sees his love diversified as a white peacock now, and then like a meteor, and then like Danae the mother of Perseus. The verb “sleep” (1) personifies everything. Not only do the petals sleep, but also the cypress waves. The plants are personified with emotion, which actually reflects the poet’s emotion. The use of alliteration adds rhythm to this poem, at the same time place emphasis on those words. “Now sleeps the crimson petal, /now the white; /nor waves the cypress in the palace

walk; /nor winks the gold fin in the porphyry font: /the firefly wakens: waken thou with me” (1-4). Everything goes in a smooth and gentle pace; the color of life is both bright and vague. It is deep rooted in the poet’s heart. Whatever it is, how beautiful and happy would it be if one could make everyone fall in love?

Love is a beautiful subject. Even by saying the word love, one can feel the beauty of it. And the use of rhyme definitely highlights the love subject in the poems. In “ Go, Lovely Rose,” every stanza has five lines, and the last word of the first line rhymes with that in the third sentence and the last word of the second line rhymes with that in both the fourth and the fifth line.

These four poems show how the Carpe Diem theme can generate countless wonderful poetry. The charm of Carpe Diem poems lies not only in the beauty of the poems themselves, but also in the themes, which reflect the fleeting nature of life. The connotative themes of enjoying love and sex resonate with common attitude towards life. While expressing the Carpe Diem theme, these poems are fundamentally similar in the genre of Carpe Diem as well as in the artistic pictures they create. Even though some poems avoid direct emphasis on sex, most poems reflect the nature of love and the sports of love. It is of great significance that the genre of Carpe Diem will long have an important place in English literature. What echoes with human emotion is the deep urge to love, the call for love and to enjoy the fruit of love, which is sex. Time and youth shall be cherished for they are so short that in a second a maid could become old. Therefore, it is important to seize the moment and have fun, especially to play the game of love; those who have time and are youthful are at the most beautiful age to love. At the same time, the eternal subject is not only for lovers but also for artists and poets who cannot bear the fleeting and waste of the beauty. And all the literary devices used help the poems sound more appealing

and heart touching. In the world of poems, love is eternal yet shifting, and the game of love is romantic and beautiful.

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