

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

One of the most longstanding features that is considered in the middle of the 17th century English literature is the existence of the Cavalier poets and their notable works. Cavalier poets is “a group of mid-17th century English lyric poets, mostly courtiers of King Charles I during the English Civil War” (“Cavalier Poets”). They wrote poems in a way which embodies the *Carpe diem* (seize the day) attitude, and it was reflected on the themes of their major works. For this thesis I choose two of the greatest Cavalier poets, Robert Herrick and Richard Lovelace, who bear certain comparable similarities and differences in their works.

Robert Herrick is widely considered as the greatest Cavalier poet who has ever lived even though he was not a courtier of Charles I. Herrick was one of Ben Johnson’s followers called “Sons of Ben”, which made him excellent in writing poems. “Herrick, being influenced by his master as a lyricist, was famous for his simplicity, his care for design and detail, and his management of words and rhythms, which made him recognized as a great lyricist in his era” (“English

Literature, 1500 to 1799: Biographies; Robert Herrick”). Another reason why I choose Herrick is that he has a strong Cavalier spirit reflected in the themes of his works which promote how everyone should always seize the day physically, by doing and experiencing the earthly pleasures such as making love and getting drunk while one still has time. Paul Willis said that, “For the wistful spirit of *Carpe diem*, he is truly unsurpassable” (Willis).

Being a soldier who dedicated all his life to the King, along with his cleverness and charms, Richard Lovelace became a great and well known Cavalier poet. He was “the most amiable and beautiful person that ever eye beheld; a person also of innate modesty, virtue and courtly deportment” (Wood). Another reason why I choose Lovelace is that his *Carpe diem* spirit can be seen clearly from his works. He shows the readers how one should seize the day mentally, by celebrating inner feelings and virtues such as freedom of mind and soul, honor, and tranquility. “Among the poets who rallied to the king’s support during the years of civil war, Lovelace has long been considered the unrivaled embodiment of the Cavalier spirit” (Anselment).

I choose six poems that contain the ideas of *Carpe diem* as their themes. *Carpe diem* is a Latin aphorism which is usually translated into “seize the day”, and it is first taken from a Horace’s poem in 23 BC. Three of the poems are the works of Herrick entitled “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time,” “A Lyric to Mirth,” and “Corinna’s Going A-Maying,” while the other three are Lovelace’s entitled “To Althea, from Prison,” “To Lucasta, Going to The Warres,” and “The Grasshopper.”

The first reason why I choose these poems is that all of them describe the theme of “seize the day” to the readers in a simple, clear, and beautiful way. “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time,” “A Lyric to Mirth,” and “Corinna’s Going A-Maying” are considered to be the finest poems composed by Herrick, all of which reflect the idea of seizing the day by urging someone to experience earthly pleasures. George Walton Scott said that these poems are “Herrick’s finest and most sustained poems- perhaps his masterpieces, and even remarks on his knowledge of the time-honored customs. . .” (Scott).

Lovelace’s three poems are widely known as his most famous works that suggest the idea of celebrating inner feelings and virtue, despite their strength of telling the *Carpe diem* theme through their dictions. “Lovelace seeks to celebrate freedom and tranquility. His sense of happiness encourages the idealism and the imagination apparent in his most famous poems, “To Althea, from Prison,” “To Lucasta, Going to The Warres,” and “The Grasshopper”” (Anselment).

I choose to analyze the theme of the poems through dictions. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, theme is “An idea that recurs in or pervades a work of art or literature”(“Theme”), while diction is “The choice of words and phrases in speech or writing” (“Diction”). I decide to focus on the dictions because the strength of Cavalier poetry lies on its simple dictions. It reflects every thought as they are supposed to be understood along with their motto *Carpe diem*. “In fact, the strong factor that binds the cavaliers together is their use of direct and colloquial language which expresses a highly individualistic personality”(Skelton). The dictions help reveal the themes which will show how the Cavalier poets lived and applied the concept of seizing the day.

Statement of the Problem

The statements of the problems of this thesis are as follows:

1. What are the themes of the poems?
2. How do the dictions of the poems help to reveal the themes?

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this thesis are:

1. To show the themes of the poems which reflect the idea of *Carpe diem*.
2. To show how the dictions help to reveal the themes of the poems.

Method of Research

The method of research that I used in writing this thesis is library research. First I read all six poems before I analyzed them. Afterwards, I started to analyze the theme of each poem through the dictions. Then I browsed, read and collected a lot of references from the Internet websites and several books to help me with my analysis. The next thing I did was to make comparisons of similarities and differences between the poems. In the end, I drew a conclusion from my analysis.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into three parts, preceded by the Acknowledgements, the Table of Contents, and the Abstract. Chapter One is the Introduction, comprises the Background of the Study, the Statement of the Problem, the Purpose of the Study, the Method of Research, and the Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two is the Analysis of the *Carpe diem* Theme in Robert

Herrick's Three Poems, followed by Chapter Three which is the Analysis of The *Carpe diem* Theme in Richard Lovelace's Three Poems, and the last chapter is Conclusion. The thesis ends with the Bibliography and the Appendices, which give-out the attachment of Robert Herrick's and Richard Lovelace's poems, and the Biography of the Authors.