

English Honours
Semester-v (DSE-2)
Carpe Diem

Origin

The origin of this phrase is traced to a Latin poem from the book of Horace, Odes Book-I. Later, many writers used it as a quote in their works. For instance, Lord Byron included it in his work Letters. Horace uses it in his poem, Dum loquimur, fugerit invida/Aetas: carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero. According to Horace, our future is unpredictable, so we should do whatever we can do today, and do not count on chances and opportunities that might come in the future.

Meaning

The exact meaning of this phrase is to “seize the day.” It is a proverb, which means that one should act today, and not wait for the future. More precisely, it refers to the plucking of the fruits. Thus, the full meaning of this line is to pluck your day, trust in the future as little as possible. In simple words, it means to enjoy today and the moment, without wasting time, because no one knows what may happen in the future.

Usage

The use of this is very common. We can use it in a similar way to other proverbs in English, which tell us that we should make the most of the time we have, as we have a short time on the earth. This phrase also serves as a central theme in the book “Dead Poet Society”. Other familiar English proverbs with similar meanings include, “the early bird catches the worm” and “strike while the iron is hot.” A teacher may advise his students, or else a waiter may ask his the customers “Carpe Diem.” In similar way, a spot or an event could have the slogan to attract tourists.

Literary Source

This Latin phrase appears in a poem by written by Horace in Odes Book I, where it reads as,

“Sapias, vina liques et spatio brevi

Dum loquimur, fugerit invida

Aetas: carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero.”

(Odes, 1.11)

It implies that one should make the most of his present moment, and grab hold of the chances he gets for happiness as soon as they appear, before they disappear, because life is very short. Simply, it suggests that we live each and every day of life to its fullest.

Literary Analysis

From a literary point of view, this phrase is very important, as it sheds a light on the whole philosophy. It lies at the heart of Epicurus' philosophy of Epicureanism, which asserts that pleasure is the greatest good, and in order to attain pleasure, a person needs to live an enjoyable and luxurious life, without paying any attention to any other thing. Its literary advantage is that instead of giving explanations, it just sums upon the luxurious lifestyle or invitation to a luxurious lifestyle in just two words. However, it is understood clearly in the context of Horace's Epicurean background, which means do not trust your future, as it may never come at all. The right time to take action is today, not tomorrow.

Moumita Das

English Department