Poetry Professor S. P. Dhanavel Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Indian Institute of Technology, Madras Lecture - 22 Andrew Marvell

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<section-header> Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) Historical and Literary Context Andrew Marvell "To His Coy Mistress" Analysis A Logical Reading A Poststructuralist Reading A Feminist Reading Anne Finch's Revisionary poem

Metaphysical poetry is really brilliant, interesting, it continues to interest the readers, primarily because of John Donne and Andrew Marvell. They have a set of poems which enthral the readers, give them pleasure.

The last poet we have for our discussion on metaphysical poetry is Andrew Marvell. The same historical and literary context shaped Marvell as well. But there is some difference, he did not participate in the civil war directly, he was away from England at that time. He shaped himself in a slightly different way.

His best poem, endearing poem is "To His Coy Mistress." We will read the poem and then offer many interesting analyses including our own analysis of rhetorical, linguistic strategies, metrical strategies, and then three different strategies of reading from logical, poststructuralist, and feminist points of view.

Finally, we will have a poem from Anne Finch, an American poet who has written a poem as a rebuttal to Andrew Marvell. It is fantastic to see how a 20th century woman poet could respond to Andrew Marvell.

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Historical and Literary Context

- King Charles I (1625-1649)
- The Commonwealth (1649-1660) Cromwell
- King Charles II (1660-1685)
- Conflict between the royalists and parliamentarians -Tories and Whigs
- The English Civil War (1642-1649)
- Courtiers and poets seeking patronage and expressing their opinion was a tricky business
- Anonymous pamphleteering prospered
- · Changing sides was a common sight.
- Cavalier poets like Carew, Lovelace, Herrick, Suckling, supported the King.



Yes, King Charles I, that period in English history was a turbulent period because the king himself was found to be guilty and killed by his own people, paving the way for a period known as the commonwealth period in English history, administered by Thomas Cromwell.

When the commonwealth period ended, we have this restoration of King Charles II. But the conflict between the royalists and the parliamentarians, supporters of the king, and supporters of the parliament took very different shapes and identities.

In this period, we have one group emerging called Torie, Tories supporting the king and Whigs supporting the parliament. This is a sad history in the history of English life and society, the civil war period. Courtiers and poets' people, they had to seek patronage from people and express their own opinion and this was a very tricky business. If you support the wrong person you will lose your patronage. It was a very difficult period for all kinds of people.

But one thing emerged in this period, without name, anonymously, people would be expressing their opinions in the form of a new form of writing called pamphleteering. They would publish their opinions in the form of an essay without their own names. People took sides and then changed the sides as well. One day they would support the government that is the king, and another day they would support the parliament or Cromwell.

That is how life kept on changing. What would happen next day they would not know. So, life was uncertain. We have a group of poets writing in this period called Cavalier poets, Carew, Lovelace, Herrick, Suckling, these poets supported the king.

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Andrew Marvell (1621-1678)

- Tutor to the daughter of Lord Fairfax (1650-1652)
- Assistant to John Milton (1657-1659)
- Member of Parliament from Hull (1659-1678)
- Known as a public servant rather than a poet in his time
- · A 'Puritan' but wrote an exemplary erotic poem
- Poems published posthumously in 1681 but did not receive much attention
- Romantics like Blake and Wordsworth and Victorians like Tennyson appreciated him
- · Revived in 20th century by Grierson and Eliot
- · Eliot's essay on Andrew Marvell.

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In this context emerged Andrew Marvell. He studied in Cambridge University and then became a tutor to the daughter of Lord Fairfax. Later on, he became an assistant to John Milton, with his help he became an officer in Cromwell's government. He was also a member of parliament from Hull.

In his own lifetime, Marvell was known as a public servant and not a poet. He was growing up in a puritan environment but he has written one of the best erotic poems in English. Most of his poems were published after his death in 1681. When they were published there was not much-celebrated reception to Marvell's poem.

Later on, in 19th century we have Blake and Wordsworth receiving the poems of Marvell with some interest. Similarly, the Victorian poet Tennyson also responded to Marvell enthusiastically. However, with the revival of metaphysical poetry in 20th century by Grierson and Elliot, Marvell became one of the best-known poets of this metaphysical school.

To understand Marvell better, we have one essay by T. S. Eliot called 'Andrew Marvell.' It would be nice to read this particular article to understand the contribution of Andrew Marvell to metaphysical poetry.

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"To His Coy Mistress"

· Three verse paragraphs:

First verse paragraph 20 lines Second verse paragraph 12 lines Third verse paragraph 14 lines; It looks like a sonnet.

- · The last six lines summarize the plea forcefully.
- A seduction poem; carpe diem; seize the day



The poem we have chosen for discussion is 'To His Coy Mistress.' It is one of the bestknown poems of Marvell, frequently anthologized, found in all courses on poetry, loved by people from all sections, academics and common people.

This poem has three verse paragraphs. The first verse paragraph has 20 lines, the second 12 lines, and the third 14 lines. The third section almost looks like a sonnet and the last 6 lines summarize the plea, the argument put forward by the speaker in the poem very powerfully, it is known as a seduction poem.

Remember, we have seen a separation poem from Michael Drayton. Since this poem is totally different from what Michael Drayton has written on this separation. Here, the poet tries to seduce the beloved. That is why it is called seduction poem, and it has a name 'carpe diem' poem or the theme of this poem is considered to be seize the day. Catch hold of the time available to you and live your life as enjoyably as enthusiastically as possible. Live life fully, that is the idea of this seduction poem.

First Verse Paragraph -I

Had we but world enough and time, This coyness, lady, were no crime. We would sit down, and think which way To walk, and pass our long love's day.

- Thou by the Indian Ganges' side Shouldst rubies find; <u>I by the tide</u> Of Humber would complain. I would Love you ten years before the flood, And you should, if you please, refuse
- 10. Till the conversion of the Jews.





Let us see the first verse paragraph now.

"Had we but world enough and time,

This coyness, lady, were no crime.

We would sit down, and think which way

To walk, and pass our love's day.

5. Thou by the Indian Ganges' side

Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide

Of Humber would complain. I would

love you ten years before the flood,

And you should, if you please, refuse

10. Till the conversion of the Jews."

First Verse Paragraph -II

My <u>vegetable love</u> should grow Vaster than empires and more slow; An hundred years should go to praise Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;

- 15. Two hundred to adore each breast, But thirty thousand to the rest; An age at least to every part, And the last age should show your heart. For, lady, you deserve this state,
- 20. Nor would I love at lower rate.





"My vegetable love should grow

Vaster than the empires and more slow;

An hundred years should go to praise

Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;

15. Two hundred to adore each breast,

But thirty thousand to the rest;

An age at least to every part,

And the last age should show your heart.

For, lady, you deserve this state,

20. Nor would I love at lower rate."

Second Verse Paragraph

- 21. But at my back I always hear Time's winged chariot hurrying near; <u>And yonder all before us lie</u> Deserts of vast eternity.
- 25. Thy beauty shall no more be found; Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound My echoing song; then worms shall try That long-preserved virginity, And your quaint honour turn to dust,
- And into ashes all my lust;
 The grave's a fine and private place, But none, I think, do there embrace.





21. "But at my back, I always hear

Time's winged the chariot hurrying near;

And yonder all before us lie

Deserts of vast eternity.

25. Thy beauty shall no more be found;

Nor, in the marble vault, shall sound

My echoing song; then worm shall try

That long-preserved virginity,

And your quaint honour turn to dust,

30. And into ashes all my lust;

the grave's a fine and private place,

But none, I think, do there embrace."

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Third Verse Paragraph

Now therefore, while the youthful hue Sits on thy skin like morning dew,

- 35. And while thy willing soul transpires At every pore with instant fires, Now let us sport us while we may, And now, <u>like amorous birds of prey</u>, Rather at once our time devour
- 40. Than languish in his slow-chapped power. Let us roll all our strength and all Our sweetness up into one ball, And tear our pleasures with rough strife Through the iron gates of life:
- 45. Thus, though we cannot make our sun Stand still, yet we will make him run.





"Now, therefore, while thy youthful hue

Sits on thy skin like morning dew,

35. And while thy willing soul transpires

At every pore with instant fires,

Now let us sport us while we may,

And now, like amorous birds of prey,

Rather at once our time devour

40. Than languish in his slow-chapped power.

Let us roll all our strength and all

Our sweetness up into one ball,

And tear our pleasures with rough strife

Through the iron gates of life;

Thus, though we cannot make our sun

Stand still yet we will make him run."

As you can see, it is a very powerful poem appealing to a lady to live with the man, the speaker, so that they can produce something called the son and leave him after the sun that is the solar sun.

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Thematic Contrast

- · Life/Love is opposed to Death.
- · Live and love physically also.
- Use the given charm.
- · We can wait till we agree.
- · But time flies fast and knocks at our door.
- · Why waste your beauty, which anyway turns into dust?
- · Procreation/ Poetic creation is a way to conquer time.
- Do not be coy. Coyness is a crime against time.
- · Punishment is death without a trace.
- · An implied listener who does not listen at all.





There is a quiet contrast between two basic ideas, two opposite ideas. One is life, another is death. Life is known by this love. Love, and life they go together and they oppose death. Death is a reality. So, what are we to do? Let us live and love physically as well, why platonically alone? So, use a given charm we are made beautiful. Why not use our physical charm to live our life happily? That is what the poet addresses the lady with his plea.

We can wait till we agree, we can quarrel and wait for a long time but then time flies. Time knocks at the door, why waste your beauty which anyway turns into dust? Procreation is one of the best ways to leave some trace in this world. When poets did not find this procreation successful, particularly Shakespeare, for example, in his sonnets he suggests this idea of poetic creation it actually happens in this poem.

Procreation or poetic creation is a way to conquer time. So, he tells the lady do not be coy, it is a crime, coyness is a crime against time. Punishment is death. That is if you are coy there is a punishment and you will face death and you will not be found anywhere, there is no trace of you. And there is an implied listener who does not listen at all, the poet simply speaks, persuades, rhetoric, all his rhetorical flourish does not bring about any kind of reply, response from the lady.

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Poetic Devices Apostrophe: address to an absent lady Hyperbole: love from two different continents (5-7) would love in the past and in future too Metaphor: "vegetable love," (11) "marble vault" (26) Simile: like morning dew (34), like amorous birds of prey (38) Hyperbaton: our time devour (39) Conceit: in praise of the body/ sex Personification/ Symbol: Time's winged chariot (22)

- Alliteration: private place (31)
- Assonance: I by the tide (6)



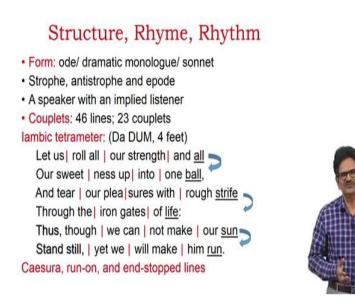
Such a powerful poem employs many poetic devices, right from apostrophe to assonance. This is an address to a lady, an absent lady, we do not see her, we do not find her voice. When this poem is used as a rhetorical strategy to persuade the lady, naturally, we find hyperbole. Hyperbole from different continents, the lady from Indian Ganges and the man from England Humber. They can continue to love from different locations but that will not help them because they do not have enough time.

He also suggests they could live in the past, live in future also, and live and love eternally. But this eternal love will not bring them together physically to enjoy this consummator life. So, he uses some metaphors like vegetable love, a love which will grow like a vegetable in different parts, in plenty, in different parts of the world throughout the empire, British empire.

He also uses the metaphor of marble vault which cannot protect the lady from the worms. He uses simile like morning dew, like amorous birds of prey, let us play, enjoy like birds of prey. That is something interesting to notice, birds of prey, how they violently, let us have union violently that is what in all measures, all possible measures that is how he suggests.

We have an interesting hyperbaton; our time devour is the actual phrase used but it would be devouring our time. The whole poem is a conceit in the sense of praising the body or even sex as canonization poem did. Personification and symbol, we have through this time. Time, it is not just time; it's a person; it is a winged chariot, it is a chariot or a charioteer with a wing flying fast. We have alliteration like private place; assonance, I by the tide; we have such words and phrases throughout the poem, "I by the tide."

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Here we have an interesting structural pattern. The poem is considered to be in the form of an ode addressing a lady in the form of a dramatic monologue including a sonnet addressing a lady who does not oblige or listen to the speaker. Like the Elizabethan Petrarchan sonnet, Marvell is praising, celebrating the beauty of the lady.

We also have a three-part structure strophe, antistrophe, and epode as in the form of an ode. As we said, there is a speaker, the poet he is appealing to the lady who is listening without responding. The whole poem is in the form of couplets. We have 46 lines that means we have 23 couplets.

The poem is in iambic measure, specifically tetrameter. When we have one foot less from Penta, we have this tetrameter and this tetrameter actually indicates the flying time, the fast movement of time. So, the whole poem, the pace of the poem will be faster.

Let us roll all our strength and all Our sweetness up into one ball And tear our pleasures with rough strife Through the iron gates of life, Thus, though we cannot make our sun, Stand still, yet we will make him run." We have indicated the foot through this straight line we have. 'Let us roll all our strength and all,' in all these lines we have shown.

We have this caesura in the last two lines; thus, stand still, there is a pause. We have run on lines in the first line, the third line, and also in this fifth line. And all our sweet rough strife through the 'our sun stand still;' we have end-stopped line at the end with a full stop, we have also comma at the end of a line to indicate this pause. This is a powerful poem with this iambic tetrameter about love, about the power of love from a man to a woman.

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Overall Impression

- An extraordinary lyrical poem of love and death and time.
- · Persuades the lady not to be coy.
- · It supplies reasons for the lady to yield to the lover.
- It impresses upon the lady to live and die rather than without living, reproducing a son against the sun.
- Hyperbolic and paradoxical language to convey the urgency of overcoming the limitations of time.
- · Not coy about being explicit in persuading the lady.
- · A brilliantly constructed rhetorical poem.
- The pathos of the human condition of being helpless against time.





In sum, we can see that this is an extraordinary lyrical poem of love, remember, and also death; both love and death in time. It attempts to persuade the lady not to be coy, it attempts to invite her to a physical way of life to enjoy this life, it gives a number of reasons.

The main reason is time is not our disposal, we will be we are subject to time, one day we will be buried and worms will eat you and as well as me. We will turn into dust that is a biblical idea we have in this poem as well, a kind of allusion to the biblical idea of human being turning into dust.

It attempts to impress upon the lady to live life fully and then die, rather than without living, reproducing a son against the sun. The language of the poem is hyperbolic and paradoxical to convey the urgency of overcoming the limitations of time. It is the human beings who are more often worried about the power of time, the passage of time.

The poet or the speaker is not at all coy about being explicit in persuading the lady to have this physical enjoyment. It is a brilliantly constructed rhetorical poem as we saw a number of

poetic devices used by the poet. And also, there is some logic, logic is also used powerfully by both rhetoric and logic go together powerfully in this poem to make it a brilliantly constructed rhetorical poem. The pathos of the human condition is being helpless against time, who can stop time?

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Logical Reading

- Major premise
 - (Low and Pival, 1969) "Had we but world enough and time,
 - This covness, lady, were no crime."
- Minor premise

"But at my back I always hear Time's winged chariot hurrying near;"

Conclusion/ Inference

"Now therefore, while the youthful hue Sits on thy skin like morning dew. ... Now let us sport us while we may,"

- Logical exposition plus emotional persuasion
- · Imagery: vegetable and mineral to animal levels



Now, we will have some readings of the poem. One reading is called logical reading because it uses a number of logical strategies, the syllogistic structure is found in this poem. There is a three-part structure in any syllogism: major premise, minor premise, and conclusion or inference from these two: major premise and minor premise.

We have this reading from Low and Pival. We have this reference at the end. The major idea is, "had we but world enough and time, This coyness, lady, where no crime." Coyness is a crime because we do not have enough time. This shyness, the reserved nature of this lady is a crime against time, the poet says.

The minor premise is, "but at my back, I always hear Time's winged chariot hurrying near." On the one hand, you are reserved, you are not responding to the plea of the man; on the other hand, time is calling. So, the conclusion of these two statements is, therefore, "now, therefore, while the youthful hue Sits on thy skin like morning dew... Now let us sport us while we may..." Sport of love, sport of life, take it seriously and live life happily. That is what the poem concludes through this logical structure.

On the one hand, we have this logical exposition, on the other hand, we have this emotional appeal to the lady. That is where we have this logic and rhetoric coming together to make up

this poem a great poem. We have this powerful imagery of this vegetable love, turning into minerals and then animal levels, what is the use of turning into this animal dust, mineral level without enjoying this life.

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A Poststructuralist Reading

- Belsey contextualizes the poem in the tradition of dance macabre using Phillippe Aries's study of attitudes to death in *The Hour of Our Death* (1983).
- Middle Age: death was an every day phenomenon in public mourning
- Renaissance: partly in paintings and collections
- 17th C: in antique collections skull, weapons,
- 19th C: death denied as a gateway to heaven
- 20th C: denial of death as a private affair
- 21st C: technological war with death (SPD)
- · Market forces try to banish death from our lives.





A very interesting post-structuralist reading of this poem is given by Catherine Belsey in her essay, the reference you can see at the end. Belsey contextualizes the poem in the tradition of dance macabre using Phillippe Aries' study of attitudes to death in his book 'The Hour of Our Death,' published in 1983.

In the middle age, death was an everyday phenomenon in public mourning. People would mingle, find out, death happening every day. Death would not be hidden from people; it was a public event. In the renaissance, we noticed that death was not such a great public event, this was shown in paintings or in collections of antique things.

And in 17th century, the contact with death became a little less, only shown in antique collections in the form of skulls and weapons. And similarly, in the 18th century and 19th century we find progress, further progress in the sense of detachment, or running away from the idea of death.

In 19th century, death was denied because it was considered to be a gateway to heaven, and in 20th century, death was not at all seen in public life. At least this is an idea that we have in the European context, denial of death as a private affair. If somebody died it was a private affair, no one would bother about it. But in 20th century or in 21st century we can see there is a technological war with or against death. We see this happening during this COVID-19 time.

All kinds of instruments are produced, created to keep death away. And in this we have market forces, companies, factories, scientists, technologies being invented to banish death, to remove death from our lives. Death is a reality that is what religion tells us. In 20th century market forces try to banish death from our lives without realizing death is a reality that we have to face.

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A Feminist Reading

- · A text of male desire
- Man's wish to defeat time by the genealogical narrative of transmission from father to son
- The lady has no voice.
- · The lady's tool of safety is virginity.
- She has a choice to say no to male desire and procreation of life
- The mistress must resist and the female reader should also resist the male text and critical practice;
- A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature Source: Duyfhuizen (1988)



We have a very interesting feminist reading. Actually, it is a response of feminist critics to this text of male desire. A male speaker desires the body of a woman that is why it is called a 'text of male desire.' A man wishes to defeat time by the genealogical narrative of transmission from father to son, for that a woman is required.

The woman does not have any voice, she is just a listener. She has the opportunity or a chance to resist this male desire by protecting her virginity. She can remain an unmarried, or she can remain an untouched woman by a male. So, she can remain pure. She has a choice to say no to the male desire. She did not, she need not participate in this procreation of life with a man. According to some of these feminist critics, they say, the mistress must resist and the female reader should also resist the male text and male critical practice of reading and glorifying a man's love for a woman.

Such a kind of approach is given to us in a book called, 'A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature.' One resisting reader, the concept of resisting reader is applied. Particularly for a woman, a woman should be a resisting reader that resistance must be to male desire, male practice.

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Annie Finch's "Coy Mistress"



Sir, I am not a bird of prey: a Lady does not seize the day. I trust that brief Time will unfold our youth, before he makes us old. How could we two write lines of rhyme were we not fond of numbered Time and grateful to the vast and sweet trials his days will make us meet?



This is the most important and interesting of all responses that we have to Andrew Marvell. Annie Finch is an American poet, she has the same title, Coy Mistress, and she has a short poem of 16 lines. It is actually a continuation of Marvell's poem; it is kind of sequel. What would be a poem like if the lady responded? So, we have this poem.

This speaker addresses the speaker of Marvell's poem. Sir, I am not a bird of prey; remember like amorous birds of prey. So, she says,

Sir, I am not a bird of prey; a Lady does not seize the day. I trust that brief time will unfold our youth, before he makes us old. How could we two write lines of rhyme where we not fond of numbered time and grateful to the vast and sweet trials his days will make us meet? (Refer Slide Time: 26:20)







"The grave is not just the body's curse;

no skeleton can pen a verse!

So, while this numbered World we see,

Let's sweeten time with poetry,

and time, in turn, may sweeten Love

and give us time our love to prove.

You've praised my eyes, forehead, breast:

You've all our lives to praise the rest."

Just keep on praising do not bother about me. That is what this Annie Finch's speaker tells the speaker of Andrew Marvell. We have a beautiful video of this reading, dramatization of Marvell and Annie Finch together in one YouTube video, the link is given here. Please click it and watch it and enjoy the rendering visually and verbally.

Summary

- Historical and Literary Context
- Andrew Marvell
- >"To His Coy Mistress"
- Analysis
- · Logical Reading
- · A Poststruturalist Reading
- · A Feminist Reading
- >Annie Finch's Revisionary Poem



We have examined Andrew Marvell's poem, To His Coy Mistress, as a poem which deals with the problem of time for human beings particularly, young people who want to live life fully physically with enjoyment. The speaker of this poem appeals to a young lady who does not listen to him. So, he praises her in different ways. He says he can praise her in so many ways for so many years, each age can be used to praise her parts of various physical features. But then, we find that the lady remains quiet but the fact of the matter is death is common to all. Both the human beings, male or female, will have to die one day and so, 'seize the day' that is what the poet says but the lady remains quiet.

We found different readings of this poem, a logical reading, a post-structuralist reading, and a feminist reading. This logical reading appeals to the lady using all kinds of logic along with rhetoric, and post-structural reading tells us about the fact of death and how we are trying to keep death away; the feminist reading considers this poem a text of male desire, it has to be resisted and the female reader specifically must approach the poem with resistance.

And as if to prove this feminist understanding of this poem, we have Annie Finch who has written a revisionary poem in response to Andrew Marvell's poem, To His Coy Mistress with the same title. Hope you will read this poem on your own in leisure and enjoy this. Please do watch the video link we have given.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time+continue=58&v=ljLFNgFaUcc&feature=emb+logo

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And now, let us see the references. There are many references, Catherine Belsey and Duyfhuizen, these two may be of interest. For advanced readers, T. S. Eliot's essay will be very useful for appreciating Andrew Marvell, and for those who are interested in this rhetorical and logical readings may consider the last one, Low and Pival. All the best, thank you.