

University of Anbar

College of Arts

Department of English

Lectures in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry

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Lecture One

1- Introduction to the Cavalier Poetry

Cavalier poets (also known as the Tribe of Ben) lived in the 17th century, and were loyal to King Charles I. In this lesson, we take a look at the Cavalier poets and their style. We also analyze how Cavalier poetry differed from metaphysical poetry, which was popular during the 17th century as well.

Definition of Cavalier Poetry

The **Cavalier poets**, members of the aristocracy, wrote in the 17th century and supported King Charles I, who was later executed as a result of a civil war. They were known as Royalists. **Cavalier poetry** is straightforward, yet refined. Many of the poems centered around sensual, romantic love and also the idea of carpe diem, which means to 'seize the day.' To the Cavalier poet, enjoying life was far more important than following moral codes. They lived for the moment.

Cavalier poetry mirrored the attitudes of courtiers. The meaning of cavalier is showing arrogant or offhand disregard; dismissive or carefree and nonchalant; jaunty. This describes the attitude of Cavalier poets.

Characteristics of Cavalier Poetry

Some of the most prominent Cavalier poets were Thomas Carew, Richard Lovelace, Robert Herrick, and John Suckling. They emulated Ben Jonson, a contemporary of Shakespeare. These poets opposed metaphysical poetry, such as that of John Donne.

While poets like John Donne wrote with a spiritual, scientific, and moral focus, the Cavalier poets concentrated on the pleasures of the moment. Metaphysical poets also wrote in figurative, lofty language, while the Cavaliers were simple, being more apt to say what they meant in clear terms. The Cavalier poet wrote short, refined verses, and the tone of Cavalier poetry was generally easy-going.

Examples of Cavalier Poetry

We will examine poems written by Robert Herrick, Richard Lovelace and Sir John Suckling, and analyze their themes. Let's think about how these themes fit into the definition and descriptions of Cavalier poetry.

1.1- A Critical Analysis of Robert Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time"

1.2. The Text of the Poem

To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time

Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,

Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying.

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
The higher he' s a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he' s to setting.

That age is best which is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,
And while ye may, go marry;
For having lost but once your prime,
You may forever tarry.

1.3. The Analysis of the Poem

'To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time' by Robert Herrick is a four stanza poem which is separated into sets of four lines, or quatrains. It was first published in 1648 in a volume titled, *Hesperides*. It is one of the most famous poems based on the notion of "carpe diem" or seize the day.

In the first stanza of this piece the speaker begins his directions to the "Virgins" mentioned in the title of the poem. Before embarking on an analysis of this poem a reader should be able to get a basic understanding of what it is the speaker is promoting through the title. He is interested in making sure that "Virgins" do everything they can to "Make Much of Time," or make the most of the time they have.

He first tells the virgins that they need to "Gather" their "rose-buds" while they are still able. This line is not of the poet's own creation, but rather comes from Ausonius or Virgil. It is in reference to a Latin phrase which asks that one utilize their beauty before it is gone. One should "gather" or pick up the beautiful items of life they may not have access to once their own beauty is gone. No matter whether one heeds his warning or not, the speaker makes sure the reader remembers that "Time" is going to continue to fly. It is moving whether one takes advantage of it or not.

In the concluding couplet of this section it becomes clear that it is one's own beauty the speaker does not want to go to waste. He sees time as damaging to women and that they must do everything they can to use their looks while they're young.

In the second quatrain the speaker turns to one of the natural elements of the world that tells of the passing of time, the sun. It is referred to as the "glorious lamp of heaven." The sun is directly connected to God in that it shines his light down upon the earth. Just like God, there is no way to control it. The sun will

continue to rise, getting higher and higher as if it is racing the other elements of the world.

The rising leads directly into the part of life the speaker sees women as having to fear, the "setting." The peak of one's life is only one more step to eventual decline.

In the third stanza the speaker goes on to tell the women listening to his words that they are "best" at the age which "is the first / When youth and blood are warmer." It is in the early days of youth a woman is most valuable. This is the period of time she should take advantage of. If one does not do as he suggests, the time will be "spent, the worse" until time passes one by. The beauty of youth will be gone and "Time" will have control over one's later future.

The final quatrain concludes the speaker's previous arguments and tells the women who might be listening to him they should not play games with their lives. They should not be "coy" in their decisions and interactions with men but "go marry" as soon as possible.

This is a decision he sees as being crucial to a woman's life and happiness. She must marry while she is beautiful, or the opportunity will be lost. The "Virgin" might "forever tarry" if she loses her "prime."

Lecture Two

2. A Critical Analysis of Richard Lovelace's "To Althea, from Prison"

2.1. The Text of the Poem

To Althea, from Prison

When Love with unconfined wings

Hovers within my Gates,

And my divine *Althea* brings

To whisper at the Grates;

When I lie tangled in her hair,

And fettered to her eye,

The Gods that wanton in the Air,

Know no such Liberty.

When flowing Cups run swiftly round

With no allaying *Thames*,

Our careless heads with Roses bound,

Our hearts with Loyal Flames;

When thirsty grief in Wine we steep,

When Healths and draughts go free,

Fishes that tipple in the Deep

Know no such Liberty.

When (like committed linnets) I

With shriller throat shall sing

The sweetness, Mercy, Majesty,

And glories of my King;

When I shall voice aloud how good

He is, how Great should be,

Enlargèd Winds, that curl the Flood,

Know no such Liberty.

Stone Walls do not a Prison make,

Nor Iron bars a Cage;

Minds innocent and quiet take

That for an Hermitage.

If I have freedom in my Love,

And in my soul am free,

Angels alone that soar above,

Enjoy such Liberty.

2.2. A Critical Analysis of the Poem

To Althea, from Prison by Richard Lovelace is a four stanza poem which is separated into sets of eight lines, or octaves. Each of these octaves follows a structured and consistent rhyming pattern of ababcdcd which alternates as the poet saw fit throughout of four verses.

Lovelace wrote this piece in 1642 while imprisoned in Gatehouse Prison adjoining Westminster Abbey. He had that year presented a petition to Parliament in protest of the Bishops Exclusion Bill. The bill prevented those heavily involved with the Churches of England from enacting any control over matters concerning the church.

Lovelace saw this as an injustice and from prison wrote this letter in the form of a poem to a woman named, "Althea" whose true identity has never been confirmed.

In the first stanza of this piece the speaker, who is the poet himself, begins by describing his moments of happiness within prison. Although he is imprisoned, there are moments which are lighter than others. These come on the back of his thoughts of "Althea," a woman he is deeply in love with.

He sees her hover "within" the gates of his cell. She is ephemeral and ghost-like, bringing to him a "whisper" of conversation through the "Grates." It is his memory of her joyous image which brings him the greatest happiness during his confinement.

The speaker's images of his lover go beyond simple conversation. There are moments in which he is able to "lie tangled in her hair." The two stare into one another's eyes and feel completely free. He states that in these moments no god which is "wanton" or free, to roam about "in the Air" knows the "Liberty" that he does.

In the second stanza the speaker goes on to reminisce on a number of other moments which have brought him boundless joy, and still manage to now that he is away from his lover. He speaks on the times they were able to drink from "flowing Cups" and celebrate in one another's company. The drink is pure, undiluted by the "Thames." It felt as if their heads were surrounded with roses and their hearts filled with "Loyal Flames." The drink brings them closer together.

Following the pattern constructed in the first stanza the Lovelace speaks of "liberty" in the next four lines. This time he describes how these moments in which their "thirty grief" is indulged by wine they are like fish swimming "in the Deep." The speaker and those he drinks with are loyal to the current king of England. They are unhappy with the way their country is being run but continue to give him their support. They know freedom through their drinking which is unmatched by any other, even that known by the fish of the sea. The song he sings, praising the king, (something which has just recently helped to land him in prison) allows him a freedom which is greater than that of the "Englargéd Winds" which cause a "Flood."

In the final stanza of the poem the speaker begins with a phrase which has come to be widely known and quoted. He is emphasizing his opinion of prison and how he does not have to consider himself confined when he is within its walls. If the speaker does not accept his own imprisonment, he will not be stuck in a "Cage." He can live in jail without feeling trapped.

There are others who have this ability as well. They are those with "Minds innocent." Through this phrase he is saying that the innocently jailed will be able to think their way into a better situation than they are currently in. They need not feel trapped within the walls of prison.

In the final four lines the speaker returns to the refrain which marks the end of each stanza. This time he describes how the "love" he sustains with "Althea" allows him a "freedom" in his soul which is greater than that known by "Angels...that soar above."

Lecture Three

3- Introduction to Metaphysical Poetry

The metaphysical poetry is extremely intelligent and witty. It is deeply religious but is also sure to be ironic and cynical. Learn about metaphysical poetry and how it takes on the questions that can't be answered by science.

Definition of Metaphysical Poetry

You've probably heard of haikus, lyrical poems and limericks. All of those types of poetry have specific qualities that allow us to group them together. Metaphysical poetry is a little bit different. The poems classified in this group do share common characteristics: they are all highly intellectualized, use rather strange imagery, use frequent paradox and contain extremely complicated thought.

However, metaphysical poetry is not regarded as a genre of poetry. In fact, the main poets of this group didn't read each other's work and didn't know that they were even part of a classification.

Literary critic and poet Samuel Johnson first coined the term 'metaphysical poetry' in his book *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets (1179-1781)*. In the book, Johnson wrote about a group of 17th-century British poets that included John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell and Henry Vaughan. He noted how the poets shared many common characteristics, especially ones of wit and elaborate style.

What Does Metaphysical Mean?

The word 'meta' means 'after,' so the literal translation of 'metaphysical' is 'after the physical.' Basically, metaphysics deals with questions that can't be explained by science. It questions the nature of reality in a philosophical way.

Here are some common metaphysical questions:

- Does God exist?
- Is there a difference between the way things appear to us and the way they really are? Essentially, what is the difference between reality and perception?

- Is everything that happens already predetermined? If so, then is free choice non-existent?
- Is consciousness limited to the brain?

Metaphysics can cover a broad range of topics from religious to consciousness; however, all the questions about metaphysics ponder the nature of reality. And of course, there is no one correct answer to any of these questions. Metaphysics is about exploration and philosophy, not about science and math.

Characteristics

The group of metaphysical poets that we mentioned earlier is obviously not the only poets or philosophers or writers that deal with metaphysical questions. There are other more specific characteristics that prompted Johnson to place the 17th-century poets together.

Perhaps the most common characteristic is that metaphysical poetry contained large doses of wit. In fact, although the poets were examining serious questions about the existence of God or whether a human could possibly perceive the world, the poets were sure to ponder those questions with humor.

Metaphysical poetry also sought to shock the reader and wake him or her up from his or her normal existence in order to question the unquestionable. The poetry often mixed ordinary speech with **paradoxes** and **puns**. The results were strange, comparing unlikely things, such as lovers to a compass or the soul to a drop of dew. These weird comparisons were called **conceits**.

Metaphysical poetry also explored a few common themes. They all had a religious sentiment. In addition, many of the poems explored the theme of *carpe diem* (seize the day) and investigated the humanity of life.

One great way to analyze metaphysical poetry is to consider how the poems are about both thought and feeling. Think about it. How could you possibly write a poem about the existence of God if you didn't have some emotional reaction to such an enormous, life-altering question?

3.1. Analysis of John Donne's " A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning"

3.1.1. The Text of the Poem

A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning

As virtuous men pass mildly away,
And whisper to their souls to go,
Whilst some of their sad friends do say
The breath goes now, and some say, No:

So let us melt, and make no noise,
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;
'Twere profanation of our joys
To tell the laity our love.

Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,
Men reckon what it did, and meant;

But trepidation of the spheres,
Though greater far, is innocent.

Dull sublunary lovers' love
(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit
Absence, because it doth remove
Those things which elemented it.

But we by a love so much refined,
That ourselves know not what it is,
Inter-assured of the mind,
Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the other do.

And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begun.

3.1.2. The Analysis of the Poem

'*A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*' by John Donne was written by Donne for his wife Anne, in either 1611 or 1612. It was penned before he left on a trip to Europe. It was not published until after his death, appearing in the collection *Songs and Sonnets*. The poem is divided into sets of four lines, or quatrains.

As was common within [Donne's poetry](#), there are pervading themes of death, the celebration of love and spirituality in this text. In regards to love, Donne spent the majority of the text trying to define what his love is like. Donne utilizes a number of images and analogies, which will be discussed later in this analysis, that accomplish this. By the time the speaker gets to the end, he has come to the conclusion that no matter where he is, their love will live on.

The theme of spirituality is intimately connected with that of love. Donne's speaker, who is certainly Donne himself, declares the love he shares with his partner to be spiritual in nature. It goes beyond that which ordinary people experience. This means it can overcome any mundane barrier life throws at it.

The first lines of the text bring up death. He describes a group of friends who are gathered around the death bed of a "virtuous" man. They are discussing amongst themselves when this person is going to die, and which breath might be his last.

Images and Conceits

One of the most important and recognizable images associated with '*A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*' is that of a compass. It appears towards the end of the text, in line 26. It is important because it symbolizes the strength of their relationship, but also the balance that exists between the speaker and his wife.

Donne describes the compass as being "stiff" with a "fixed foot," this is his wife's part of the metaphor. She remains stationary while her husband, the speaker, "roam[s]" around. It is due to her steadfastness that he always finds his way back home. The speaker clearly sees this conceit, or comparison between two very unlike things, as a romantic. One should take note of the fact that the speaker's loyalty to his wife seems to hinge on her placidity. If she were to "roam" the entire balance would be thrown off.

Another image that is important to the text appears throughout the first half of the poem, that of natural, disastrous weather patterns. The first time one of these disasters is made clear is in the fifth line with the mention of a "flood" and a "tempest," or powerful storm. In this instance the weather is being used to show

the exaggerated emotions of lesser love. The couple he is imagining cries and sighs outrageously as if hoping someone will take note of their passion.

In the first stanza of this piece the speaker begins with an image of death. He is speaking on the death of a man who is "virtuous." Due to his good nature his death comes peacefully. Donne compares dying in this instance to "whisper[ing]" one's soul away. There is nothing traumatic about it. "Whisper" is a perfect example of onomatopoeia. The word sounds or resembles the noise it represents.

The dying man is not alone. There are "sad friends" around his bed who are unable to decide whether or not the man is dead. His final moments are so peaceful that there is no sign to tell the onlookers the end has come. They speak to one another asking if "The breath goes now" or not.

The second stanza might come as something of a surprise to readers unused to Donne's complicated use of conceit. Rather than explaining what the first stanza was all about, it adds on additional information. The speaker is comparing the peaceful death of a virtuous man to the love he shares with the intended listener. When they separate they do so without the "tear-floods" and "sigh-tempests" of the shallow. Donne's speaker sees the way other partners are around one another and knows his relationship is better.

He and his partner would never be so crass as to expose their emotions to the "laity" or common people. It is something they keep to themselves. He states that it would be a "profanation," or disgrace to their "joy" to expose it. They will "make no noise" and remain on the high ground above those involved in lesser loves.

The third stanza introduces another image of natural disaster, the "Moving of th' earth" or an earthquake. It is something unexpected and unexplained. Earthquakes also bring along "harms and fears." These lines have been added to emphasize the absurdity of making a big deal over the speaker's departure. The next two lines are a bit more obscure. They refer to the celestial spheres, or concentric circles, in which the moon, stars and planets moved. Although they are

sectioned off, they still shake and vibrate in reaction to other events. Here the speaker is describing their "trepidation," or shaking. It is a greater shaking than that which an earthquake is able to inflict but it is unseen, innocent. This is another metaphor for how the speaker sees his relationship. It is not the showy earthquake but the much more powerful shaking of the celestial spheres.

In the fifth stanza, the speaker returns to describing the lesser love of others. It is "Dull" and it is "sublunary," meaning it exists under the moon rather than in the sky. Those who participate in these relationships are driven by their senses. The "soul" of the relationship is based on what one's senses can determine. Physical presence is of the utmost importance to these loves. They "cannot admit / Absence" because it "doth remove" the entire relationship. Everything shallow lovers have with one another is based on touch and sight.

The fifth stanza provides a contrast to the fourth. He returns to his own relationship and speaks of himself and his wife as "we." They have a "refined" or well-tuned and highbrow relationship. Their love is so beyond the physical world that they, physical beings, have trouble understanding it. They "know not what it is." The next two lines reiterate the fact that the love the speaker and his wife have is spiritual. It is more mental than it is physical. This means they are "Inter-assured of the mind" and do not care for the "eyes, lips, and hands." When they part these are not the elements they will miss about one another.

The sixth stanza begins with a fairly straightforward and recognizable declaration about marriage. They might have two separate souls but now they act as "one." It is due to this fact that when they part, they will not "endure" a "breach, but an expansion." Their love will stretch as gold does when it is beaten thin. It is the same, even when pushed to the limit.

It is also important to take note of the fact that Donne chose to use gold as a representative of their love. He recognizes the elements of his relationship in its durability and beauty.

It is at this point in the piece that the image of the compass, as discussed in the introduction, becomes important. First, Donne goes back on his previous

statement about their "oneness." He knows there might be some doubt of their "inter-assured" relationship so he makes this concession. "If they," meaning himself and his wife, are "two" then they are the two legs of a compass. Donne speaks of his wife as being the "fixed foot" of the device. She has the steady "soul" that remains grounded and never makes a "show / To move." His wife only moves if "the other do," meaning himself.

In the eighth stanza the movement of the fixed foot is further described. Initially it is in the centre of their world, everything revolves around it. Then, if the other leg, the one compared to Donne, decides to "roam" far into the distance, it leans. This is the only movement that his wife makes. When he needs her to she "hearkens" after him then straightens up again, or "grows erect" when he comes home or returns to the fixed point.

The final four lines describe the metaphor in full, just in case any part of the compass analogy was in doubt. The speaker is very much addressing his lines to his wife. He tells her that she will be to him the line that brings him back in. She has a "firmness" that makes his "circle just," or keeps it within a limited area. No matter what he does or where he roams, she will always get him back to where he began.

Lecture Four

4. A Critical Analysis of George Herbert's "The Collar"

4.1. The Text of the Poem

The Collar

I struck the board, and cried, "No more;

I will abroad!

What? shall I ever sigh and pine?

My lines and life are free, free as the road,

Loose as the wind, as large as store.

Shall I be still in suit?

Have I no harvest but a thorn

To let me bleed, and not restore

What I have lost with cordial fruit?

Sure there was wine

Before my sighs did dry it; there was corn

Before my tears did drown it.

Is the year only lost to me?

Have I no bays to crown it,

No flowers, no garlands gay? All blasted?

All wasted?

Not so, my heart; but there is fruit,

And thou hast hands.

Recover all thy sigh-blown age

On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute

Of what is fit and not. Forsake thy cage,

Thy rope of sands,

Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee

Good cable, to enforce and draw,

And be thy law,

While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.

Away! take heed;

I will abroad.

Call in thy death's-head there; tie up thy fears;

He that forbears

To suit and serve his need

Deserves his load."

But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild

At every word,

Methought I heard one calling, *Child!*

And I replied *My Lord.*

4.2. Analysis of the Poem

The Collar by George Herbert is a thirty-six line poem about a [speaker](#)'s struggle for freedom. It was written by Herbert in 1633 while he struggled with his own religious beliefs. The poem does not conform to one particular rhyme scheme but jumps from half or slant rhymes to full end rhymes. There are a few moments which are more consistent in their patterns, such as the final four lines of the poem which rhyme abab. Herbert chose this pattern, or lack of pattern, to mimic the chaos of his speaker's own thoughts.

In the first stanza of this piece the speaker shocks his reader by crying out, seemingly without provocation, that he has had enough. He says, ' "No more." ' He will not remain in his life any longer. The speaker will "abroad." He asks in the following lines if it is necessary for him to "sigh and pine." The speaker is becoming more and more sure that it is not his sole purpose in life to want something he cannot have. He is severely dissatisfied with the current direction of his life and is ready to make a change.

He sees himself as being able to live in "life" and write his "lines...free, free as the road." There should be no restraints on what he is allowed to do or say. He sees a future in which life is "Loose" and resembles the "wind." He desires to live in a world as large as he wants it to be.

The following lines are used to ask if he must be "still in suit." He wants to know if it is possible for him to change his life at this time, or if he is trapped in the world he has made around himself. The next phrase proposes one type of life he could be living, one he cannot escape from. In this scenario he compares himself to a plant which produces no fruit, but only thorns on which he cuts himself. It is the blood he loses that he hopes to use to reinvigorate himself. Perhaps he can benefit off his own present suffering.

In the lines 10-18, the speaker tries to remember if there was a point in his life in which "there was wine." It would have had to have been before his "sighs did dry it." He thinks there is no way the suffering he is going through now has always been present in his life. There must've been days before in which one could find "corn" and "wine." These days would be before his "tears did drown it." To some extent, he feels as if his own emotional state is making his already bad situation worse.

The second half of the section is made up of a number of questions. He asks if there is any way for him to "crown" or save his year. He does not want it to be "lost to" him. The speaker searches for "flowers" or "garlands gay" which might be used to improve his remaining days.

Two short phrases follow; they inquire if the flowers have all been "blasted" or "wasted." The final two lines clarify that no, they have not. In his "heart...there is fruit" still. With his hands he plans to retrieve that fruit along with his happiness.

The second half of the poem begins with the speaker asking a number of different things of himself. First, he wants to recover the pleasures of his past and leave behind his "cold dispute / Of what is fit and not." He is done wasting time worrying about what is holy, proper, or good. These things will no longer interest him. It is his goal to leave behind his cage and "rope of sand."

These means of confinement that the speaker mentions were crafted by religion and by his own hands. They were made by "petty thoughts" and turned into "Good cable" which was able to "enforce and draw" and turn into the "law" which he obeyed.

He is no longer going to be a part of this lifestyle. He is moving on, away from his confinement and "collar." The final line repeats the declaration which appears at the beginning of the poem, "I will abroad," he will depart.

The final section of this piece concludes the narrator's agitated speech and produces a slight twist to the narrative. He continues speaking to himself and tries to boost his confidence for the change he is trying to make. The speaker asks that the "death's-head" leave him alone. He does not want to be bothered by his fears. It is his intention to "tie" them up and force them to serve his purpose.

The speech ends with a set of lines which utilize the rhyme scheme of abab. They are used to bring the speaker back to his known reality. He describes how his "rav[ing]" came to its climax and rather than building him up, it just brought on the voice of God. The speaker heard "*Child!*" And replied, "*My Lord.*" Like a child, he was chastised and brought back into the religious fold.

Lecture Five

5- A Critical Analysis of Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"

5.1. Text of the Poem

To His Coy Mistress

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; I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the flood,

And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires and more slow;
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
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,
Nor would I love at lower rate.

But at my back I always hear
Time' s wingèd chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
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.

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

5.2. A Critical Analysis of the Poem

Metaphysical poetry, such as *To His Coy Mistress*, is a subset of poetry popularized in the late 17th century which focused primarily on the use of what is known as 'conceit' – in layman's terms, a type of comparison that is made between two objects who are consciously nothing alike, therefore the relationship between the two things being compared is completely and utterly confused. Another tenet of metaphysical poetry was the rumination on topics far greater and grander than easy definitions; love was popular, and so was religion, and faith, and belief, and a variety of other topics along those lines. Most metaphysical poets were seldom known in their day as metaphysical poets, did not form the same sort of cohesive movement as the Romantics did in the late 18th century, and were generally considered to be too finicky in their expression. Their work, though emotional and moving, stopped short of expressing the wide ideals behind their writing.

Andrew Marvell was a metaphysical poet writing in the Interregnum period. He sat in the House of Commons between 1659 and 1678, worked with John Milton, and wrote both satirical pieces and love poetry.

The first stanza has ten couplets, and mimics a traditional format – in this case, the poem itself, although written in the form of a love poem, does not aspire to such lofty heights; the gentleman wishes only for his lady to give into his sexual advances, and so the use of the traditional love elegy format (otherwise known as 'carpe diem' poetry) might seem as though it is ironically used. However, given that this was written at a time when such emotion was not freely expressed, the beauty of the language and the overwhelming focus on the woman's beauty, the respect shown therein, makes the poem quite progressive for its time.

The man begins by explaining, to his lady, how he would go about worshipping her if he had the time. He turns their love into far more than the poem can hold by using expressions such as 'love you ten years before the Flood', thus

allegorizing it in almost Biblical terms, 'vegetable love', which shows how slow and how steady it grows (hinting, as always, at a huge advancement), and then stating that 'a hundred years' would be spent on praising her: her eyes, her forehead, two hundred years to worship her breasts, and 'thirty thousand to the rest'. Above all, *To His Coy Mistress* does not denigrate or mock the lady's appearance (such as in Shakespeare's 'My Mistress' Eyes are Nothing Like the Sun') as this was not the use of metaphysical poetry. The use of what is known as an erotic blazon – taken directly from Petrarchan love poetry – deifies the lady of the speaker's affection; this is the truest form of love that the man feels as though he can manage.

In the second stanza, the mood of *To His Coy Mistress* swings abruptly. In the first, there was little haste or rush; the poet took his time describing the woman's beauty, and all the ways that she deserved to be worshipped, producing, therefore, a flowing, relaxed poem that does not rush itself to the end. By the second stanza, however, the mood shifts, and the poet is at once pleading and urgent, telling the lady that he hears 'time's winged chariot hurrying near' (alluding to Greek mythology, another form of deifying his lady love).

Here, the poet, though no less praising of his woman's beauty, tells her that he does not have the time to worship her as he sees fit; time is always hurrying closer and closer. 'Deserts of vast eternity' await them, and her beauty will fade, her virginity will 'turn to dust' along with her honour, and all the waiting will be, it is implied, for naught. The feeling of foreboding, although light, is definitely there.

In the third stanza, the mood brightens again; the poet has a solution! They should embrace each other now, while they have the time, be together now when they are young and beautiful, and not think about the future. 'Now let us sport while we may', says the poet, urging his lady love to listen to him – 'sport' is a commonly used word, in the 17th century, for sex. He compares them to 'amorous birds of prey', thus showing the natural and impulsive urges of their nature – at once, they are both elevated above man and below him.

The last few lines take on the imagery of roiling passion: the poet wants to 'tear our pleasures with rough strife / through the iron gates of life', thus somehow elevating their own passion above life itself. Note that the last stanza is the most poetically proficient of

all things, and though the feeling is very much a plea to not waste the time that they have, the poet maintains a light-hearted tone through to the end.