

Poetry research paper example

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Presentation and evaluation of three critical approaches to the poem 'To His Coy Mistress' by Andrew Marvell – Analysis of each one of these approaches according to the socio-historical context of the era in which each approach was developed – Reflections drawn upon these three approaches and personal conclusion upon their validity

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Abstract

This research paper will present you with three critical approaches of the existing ones as far as the analysis and interpretation of the poem 'To His Coy Mistress' is concerned. The poem was written by Andrew Marvell in the 1650s, which is a literary period 'conquered' by the current of metaphysical poetry. Marvell represents this tendency in poetry to try and answer metaphysical questions concerning the meaning of life and other questions of eternal value such as what happens after death or how and under which rules does the universe exist. This particular poem is written around a specific thematic core, the one of a man in love who addresses his beloved one, his 'Mistress' and tries to convince her that there is no meaning in endless waiting for the time to unite their bodies and souls. Therefore, this poem is foremost a love confession, a lyrical ballad which focuses on the importance of feelings and the importance of enjoying each single moment in life. The first two verses of the poem declare clearly the poet's goal 'Had we but world enough, and time, / This coyness, lady, were no crime'. (lines 1-2, To His Coy Mistress). The man confesses to his real feelings and thoughts. Since life is not ample and it is short and gets by quickly, then the woman who is his love should waste no other time staying hidden behind her

hesitations and coyness and should by all means let herself get carried away by the strength of his love passion. All the poem goes round and round this effort of persuading her into giving in to his desire which he lets the readers realize that it is mutual. Like any kind of literary piece which has had a great effect on its readers and has been admired for its way of writing, its style, tone and literary devices, the poem 'To His Coy Mistress' has attracted the interest of lots of critics within the borders of the literary circle and has therefore gone under a number of different approaches. This research paper will present you with the interpretation of Samuel Johnson who has looked into the poem under the Metaphysical theory, the approach of Geoffrey Walton who is looking into the political meaning of the poem and the approach of Cleanth Brooks who also emphasizes on the political meaning of the poem 'To His Coy Mistress'.

It will analyze each theory of each one of the scholar critics who supported it according to its socio-historical context within which it was developed and it will conclude to presenting you with the personal reflections drawn upon these critics, analyzing the critical approach of the critic I myself agree with.

Key Words: Feminist Theory, Metaphysical theory, New Historicist theory, 'To His Coy Mistress'

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Samuel Johnson is one of the scholars who has looked into the poem through

the Metaphysical theory. Since he himself is one of the scholars who participated in the creation of this literary and critical term, it is not difficult to realize the reasons why he approached Marvell's poetry as a clear representative of the metaphysical poetry. Marvell lived and wrote his poetry in the period during which metaphysical poetry conquered the literary circle of that era. People at the time and especially the ones who were characterized by a constantly worried spirit which was looking for the answers in life's mystery, tried to rationalize the not easily and logically explained mysteries of life and human nature. As a result, Marvell wrote this poem as part of his effort to rationalize and accept the fact that life and youth do not last forever. In line 11 of his poem, Marvell compares his love to a vegetable. Like the vegetable has a limited life period, the love one can feel cannot live forever if not lived and experienced to its fullness. So, Marvell compares a physical quality, the one of the vegetable to a metaphysical one, the one of love. The metaphysical poetry is also characterized by the tendency of poets to mock romanticism and show through their crude criticism their skepticism as far as exaggerative expressions of feelings are concerned. Likewise, Marvell writes in lines 27 and 28 ' then worms shall try / That long preserv'd virginity,' mocking the love the man seems to have shown towards this lady who keeps her virginity and does not give in to his desire. The poet now addresses the woman of his dreams with the question on what is the purpose of romantically keeping her virginity since the end of life is the same for every single human creature. They are all eaten by worms when buried. Hyperboles are used as in line 15 ' two hundred [years] to adore each breast' (line 15) and use and expression

of logical expressions. Metaphysical poets seem to use logic and logical arguments in order to justify and explain the unsolved mysteries and problems of life. Marvell uses a number of logical arguments in order to convince 'His Coy Mistress'. Time passes by quickly and they cannot remain young forever.

On the contrary, scholars like Cleanth Brooks and Geoffrey Walton seem to have adopted a different reading of Marvell's poetry, emphasizing on its political nature and underlying meaning.

Cleanth Brooks in her book 'Criticism and Literary History: Marvell's Horatian Ode' refers to Marvell's other poems such as the poem 'To His Coy Mistress' in her effort to prove that Marvell has used his poetry as a way to express his political beliefs. In the 1650s it was the time when the established political status and theory regarding the divine quality of monarchy and monarchs who were believed to have been given the divine gift to be in power had started going under criticism. People's thought had started rebelling so as to have new questions raising in the society and social structures of that period. Probably it was time that people who had the power and wish to offer to the common wealth, were given the chance to be elected and do something to the benefit of their society. It seems that Marvell wants to support this new political belief and theory of rebelling against to the status -quo of his era. Therefore, although in lines 1-20 of his poem seems to praise the eternity and the coyness of his lady, he turns out to become quite aggressive towards this coyness and lack of initiation and action on behalf of his lady. So, all these words and messages towards his lady that she should take advantage of the time like Horace the Latin poet had said in his popular '

'carpe diem' (seize the day), are interpreted by historicists like an allegory through which Marvell leads his people of his era to realize that it is time change came. Cleanth emphasizes on the fact that Marvell does not wish to open up and express openly his opposition to the apolytarian form of monarchy but adopts metaphors and allegories as an effort to awake people's spirits.

The same belief seems to be adopted on behalf of Geoffrey Walton who also seems to emphasize on the political nature of Marvell's poem. Walton focuses on how Marvell shows his dislike to the coyness, which is probably another word for the symbolizing of monarchy. His passion for taking advantage of time and living life to the full is probably the synonym to showing and expressing indirectly his wish to live life as energetic, free citizens in a healthier political system.

Conclusion

Choosing one critical approach from the ones existing does not mean that the others are less important or of no meaning or reason of existing.

Personally I prefer to choose the critical review of Geoffrey Walton who seems to emphasize on the political nature of the poem and its emphasis on behalf of his poet on the meaning and importance of freedom for energetic, healthy political systems. I have also believed that poetry is a way through which spirits of great concern have found the best way to raise questions through allegory and metaphors as far as the meaning of life is concerned within a healthy political situation.

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