

Andrew marvell's to
his coy mistress:
light-hearted attitude
towards life and lov...

[Literature](#)



Strong Lines in Poetry by the Metaphysical Poets

This essay focusses on two Renaissance poems: 'The Flea' by John Donne and 'To His Coy Mistress' by Andrew Marvell. These two poems are quite similar as they both are written from the point of view of a speaker, and are conversations with a mistress who is reluctant to lose her virginity. Both poems are in three clear stages, however 'To His Coy Mistress' is a syllogism whilst 'The Flea' is not.

A witty argument runs through 'The Flea'. In the first stage of this poem, the speaker is telling his mistress to notice the flea, which has sucked the blood of them both. He uses a cunning argument, saying that although their blood is mixed together inside the flea "this is more than we would do". In other words, he is stating that despite the fact they are physically bonded inside the flea, she will not allow them to make love, another physical bond. The tone of this stanza is jealous, as he wants what the flea has - a bond with her. With phrases such as "yet this enjoys before it woo" and "this, alas, is more than we would do", he is effectively telling her that she can have no justification for having "pamper'd" the flea but not him.

During the second stanza of the poem, the speaker's lover offers to kill the insect. He prevents her from doing so, claiming that because of the fact that their blood is mingled inside the flea, they "more than married are", and the flea "their marriage bed and marriage temple is". He explains to her that destroying the flea would be three sins - sacrilege, destroying their marriage temple (the flea), suicide, killing part of herself as the flea contained her

blood, and murder, killing part of the speaker as it also contained his blood. This bold argument shows the wit of the speaker.

The last stage of 'The Flea' is the speaker's reaction after his mistress has killed the flea. She "triumphs", thinking that she has won the argument; however the speaker changes his argument and now presents the case that in the way his fears about killing the flea were proved to be "false fears" or ungrounded, so will her fears about losing her virginity. He tells her that "Just so much honour...will wast, as this flea's death took life from thee" if she sleeps with him. He has skilfully turned her argument to his advantage. His tone at the start of this last section is critical of her actions, calling her "cruel and sodaine" and asking why she "purpled [her] nail, in blood of innocence".

This poem is ingenious in its lines of persuasion. The cunning and dynamic personality of the speaker is displayed in its seemingly spontaneous change of argument. The change has, of course, been carefully planned by Donne, who would have spent a lot of time composing this poem and so cannot be called truly spontaneous. The images of this poem are unconventional and so it is all the more impressive that the poet has produced such a work.

Unlike 'The Flea', 'To His Coy Mistress' has the form of a syllogism - a three part logical argument. The overall theme of the poem can be summed up in the Latin phrase "carpe diem", which means seize the day.

The first section of this poem makes a premise, explaining that if they had all the time in the world, the speaker would love his mistress "ten years before

the Flood" (of Noah's Ark) until " the conversion of the Jews" (which will be at Judgement Day, the end of the world). He imagines a world without the constraint of time, when he could adore her for over thirty thousand years. In a world such as this, he would be willing to wait for as long as necessary and so the fact that she feels she is not ready to sleep with him would be " no crime". The speaker also praises his mistress in this section whilst mocking himself, comparing her to the exotic Ganges which contrasts with the muddy Humber he likens himself to. These praises certainly help the speaker in his argument for love.

The second section of ' To His Coy Mistress' is also a premise, telling her that time does exist and they are getting older all the time. This makes the tone of the poem more urgent, with phrases such as " deserts of vast eternity" to describe death and " thy beauty shall no more be found" being employed by the speaker to try and shock her. He conjures up horrific images such as that of worms trying " that long preserved virginity" and echoes of her funeral service with the words " dust" and " ashes". In addition, another shocking tactic he uses is the witty epigram:

" The grave's a fine and private place,

But none, I think, do there embrace. "

The final section presents the speaker's proposal based on the two premises mentioned and uses many persuasive devices. The proposition of the speaker is essentially the " carpe diem" idea - that they use the time that they have to make love " like amorous birds of prey". He uses sentences

beginning with “ now” three times to reinforce the idea that time is of the essence. Striking verbs such as “ sport”, “ devour”, “ roll” and “ tear” add to the feeling of urgency.

‘ To His Coy Mistress’ seems to argue much more logically than ‘ The Flea’, and it certainly contains a strong line of argument as is often suggested about the Metaphysical poets.

In conclusion, both poems use a number of persuasive devices to try and convince the mistresses to love and because of this I feel that both poems are ‘ strong’ in their arguments. ‘ To His Coy Mistress’ seems to have the stronger argument of the two because its argument is more logical, although ‘ The Flea’ is impressive because of its unconventional and original images.