

Compare the
presentation of
seduction in poems
by andrew marvell
and eileen mcaul...



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In this essay, I intend to explore and compare the differences and similarities between two poems on the subject of seduction. These poems were written in different eras and one was written by a male (Andrew Marvell) and the other by a female (Eileen McAuley.) They portray seduction in different ways, but both tease the feelings of the reader and in response, they get different reader reactions. The older poem (18th century) displays seduction as no more than a luxury to be used to advantage of the poet. “ while the youthful hue sits on the skin like morning dew.

While the modern poem displays seduction as a “ drunk and nervous” necessity that is agreed to with much disillusion. Andrew Marvell, the writer of “ To His Coy Mistress” has one main aim, to persuade his “ mistress” and the reader to concur with his point of view. He does this by writing in the first person, so we get to know exactly what he wants. The disadvantage of this is that we only hear his side of the story and as a result, we may think he is quite a selfish writer and that he doesn’t think or care about what the woman wants.

On the other hand, “ The Seduction” by Eileen McAuley is written in the third person so that we can learn about the characteristics and feelings of both people involved in the story. We can empathise with both characters and come to a conclusion of our own, about the story. McAuley is the narrator of the story; she is omniscient. The presentation of what women want in “ To His Coy Mistress” is quite vague, as we don’t know if the woman was persuaded to sleep with the poet or not. The poem only assumes that she will like his seduction.

We are however, given the impression that the woman is waiting for true love because of her “ long preserved virginity. ” In “ The Seduction” the girl has been led to believe that love is a beautiful and romantic, life-changing thing. Because of all the influences from the media she now wants this romantic love “ where you walk hand in hand, in an acne’d wonderland” and strangers lead you to bright new worlds” The techniques used to seduce in “ His Coy Mistress” are shown in the thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

In the thesis, Marvell uses images to describe and tell of his love for her. How he would give “ an age [of praise] at least to every part” of her and that his “ vegetable love should grow Vaster than empires. ” In the antithesis he uses the threat of age and death and warns her that one day her “ beauty shall no more be found” and only “ the worms shall try That long preserved virginity. ” In the synthesis, Marvell presents visualisations of them together in the hope she may fall for him by manipulating her imagination. “ Our sweetness, up into one ball. ”

In McAuley’s poem, she presents seduction as something society encourages, almost as if society is seducing the girl instead of the boy. Peer pressure and depictions of love in “ her My Guy and her Jackie photo-comics” led her to believe that love was about “ parties where you meet the boy next door” and end up with him and “ a glass of larger-shandy on a carpeted floor. ” “ She had met him at the party, and he’d danced with her all night,” but “ as he gave her so she fell in love,” so effectively she was too drunk to realise how far from reality and her expectation of love she was.

This is how the girl with her sweet innocence “ followed him there, all high white shoe” and was so easily seduced by the truant, and taken “ to the [“ murky”] river where [he] spend[s] the afternoons, when [he] should be at school. ” The use of enjambment is regular in Marvell’s work; he uses it to continue ideas so that his argument flows. For example “ and think which way To walk” and “ I would Love you ten years before the flood. ” He also uses similes as a way of flattering the woman.

For example “ the youthful hue, sits on thy skin like morning dew. ”

Enjambment also appears in “ The Seduction. but it doesn’t seem to be used for a particular purpose. It’s more like a semi-colon than the continuation of an idea, for example, “ like confetti strewn” The use of similes is also evident in this poem, but they are used to describe rather than flatter. “ Green as a septic wound,” describes the river where the event happens. Near to the end of the poem McAuley uses sarcasm to explain the girls regret about falling pregnant, “ better to be... festering, invisibly, unemployed... than fall into this despicable, feminine void. ” The poems have completely different attitude toward seduction.

In “ To His Coy Mistress,” the main point the poet is trying to make is his hopes for success. His attitude is based on flattery, this could be taken as an act, but he tries his best to make it work. “ Your quaint honour” and “ For lady, you deserve this state” are said to make the woman feel important but in the antithesis when he tries to scare her into sleeping with him “ the graves a fine and private place, but none I think do there embrace. ” In this part of the poem, he reveals his true motives. He doesn’t really love her; he

is just extremely attracted to her and doesn't want this opportunity to go to waste, so to speak.

The attitude of McAuley is quite political; the aim of the poem is to highlight society's misconceptions. Misconceptions like the fact the girl was labelled because she made one mistake and fulfilled her stereotype, " you always looked the type. " She is also trying to condemn magazines like " her My Guy and her Jackie" for leading the girl to believe in romantic love because of the " glitzy fashion features, and stories of romantic love. " They " betrayed" the girl because of their " stupid, stupid promises, only tacitly made. " McAuley is also trying to show how girls are so easily used.

By the middle of the poem can assume that the boy will have nothing to do with the girl, we can empathise when she feels lonely because " she sobbed in the cool, locked darkness of her room. " The poems are from different eras and focus on different aspects of seduction and sex. " To His Coy Mistress" is very much about winning the woman and convincing her that he loves her with exotic passion, " pass our long loves day, Thou by the Indian Ganges side," but his motives are really based on his lust and impatience, " let us sport while we may. The reader concludes that the writer of this poem is not as respectful as he first seems.

" The Seduction" is very much about gaining empathy from the reader, rather than persuading the reader to come round to a point of view. In this way the poem is very successful as it is thought provoking and emotive, but not in a " slushy" way like a stereotypical seduction poem, in a sad way. It makes the reader think about actions and preventable but maybe inevitable

consequences. It also makes them think about vulnerability and how anything can happen to anyone. In conclusion, the poems do have some similarities.

Both poems, for example portray girls as the seduced and boys/men as the not so friendly seducer. Their differences however, are far more obvious, with “ The Seduction” portraying seduction as a drunken mistake (“ she knocked it [vodka] back”) with unwanted consequences. Whereas, “ To His Coy Mistress” portrays seduction almost as an art, where you flatter the woman to get what you want. I think the attitudes of the poets are the most evident difference, and as the poets set out to achieve different things the poems are bound to have more differences than similarities.