

(ii) Myths in 'To His Coy Mistress'

Ans. (i) Cultural approach in 'To His Coy Mistress'

Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' tells the reader a good deal about the speaker of the poem. The speaker is aware about poems and conventions of love poetry, such as courtly love, conventions of medieval Europe, and about Biblical passages. The speaker shows possible awareness of the Provençal amor de lohn, neo Petrarchan 'complaints', Aquinas's concept of the triple levelled soul, Biblical echoes, a Platonic-Christian Corporeal economy, and the convention of the blagon. The speaker knows all these things well enough to parody or at least to echo them, for making his proposition to the Coy lady. He expects that his description should not be taken seriously. In order to satirize the conventions, he echoes them and makes light of the proposal. He is sure that she is aware with all this, for she also belongs to the same cultural mildew that he does. The speaker is highly educated. His Coy lady is equally well educated, and therefore knowledgeable about the conventions he uses in parody. He holds that the lady understands the periodic nature of his comments. He selects the rich allusions from his culture but he neither thinks of poverty and socio-economic deprivation nor of disease as a daily reality. At that period, one quarter of the European population was below the poverty line. In second and third stanza he alludes to the future death. But wealth and leisure and social activity are his currency, his coin for present bliss.

Formalist approach in "To his Coy Mistress"  
To His Coy Mistress is the most famous poem of Ann. Marvell, 63

In fact, it is one of the best metaphysical love-poems in English literature. This poem presents us with an obvious illustration of how a particular set of images can open out to themes in the way just described. The opening line of the poem – "Had we but world enough and time" introduces us to the space-time continuum. The poet sees the whole world of space and time as the setting for the two lovers. The structure of the poem depends on the subjunctive concept, it gives the whole poem its meaning. "Had we," the speaker says, "knowing that they do not." Here the speaker is bound by the dimensions of space and time.

The motif of space and time shows this poem to be a philosophical consideration of time, of eternity, of pleasure and of salvation in an after life.

The space motif appears not only in obvious but also in veiled allusions. The first part of the poem imagines a world in which the lovers have infinite time and her unwillingness to make love would be no crime. In the first section of the poem, we find "World", "Sit down", "Which way/to talk, the suggested difference between "Indian Ganges" and the "Humber," the distance implicit in the allusions to the Flood and to the widespread Jews of the Diaspora, vaster than empires. The conversion of the Jews suggests impossibility. The conversion of Jews would take place immediately before the end of the world or the Doomsday. The lover seems to suggest the indefinite time in future. The word 'long' refers to time but has spatial meaning too. Several other words 'before, till, go last' have overlapping qualities.

In the second part of the poem, Space and time are related in the splendid image –

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

The picture of Time's winged chariot hurrying and coming closer and closer to overtake the lovers vividly presents before our minds the picture of the rapid passing of time. The next couplet provides yonder, before, deserts. The poet also talks of the 'deserts of vast eternity'; it

suggests both space and time. It is in this single phrase that the poet has compressed the thought of death.

The lover insists on seizing the present moment:

**"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."**

Here, the word 'sits' echoes the earlier use of the word, and several words suggest movement or action in space. Youthful hue, and morning dew continues the romantic imagery. 'Pore' is somewhat unromantic allusion to the woman's body, and 'instant fires' recalls the lust and ashes-of the preceding stanza. 'Sport' takes still a different talk, though it reminds us of the playfulness of the first stanza. The lovers are also compared with "amorous birds of prey." In this phrase the idea of love-making is combined with fierceness." In the next line also he speaks in the same language, using the word 'devour'. "At once our Time devour", it suggests that they would not allow time to devour them but would overcome time by the gratification of their passion. 'Languish' and 'slow-chapped power' means the power of the slowly moving jaws. Here Time is regarded as a monster which, with the sharp jaws, can crush human beings slowly and surely.

The phrase 'through the iron gates of life' has more important meaning. It also suggests the passing from temporal life into the not so certain eternity mentioned earlier. The concluding couplet of the poem combines space and time. It may extend time backward to suggest Old Testament days and classic mythology.

The space-time relationship is one of the major motifs of the poem. After it, sexual motif is a second important motif which is used in the poem to present the theme. At first the sexual motif gradually emerges romantically. But as the speaker continues, it emerges more brutally. In the first stanza the distant Ganges and the redness of rubies are

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romantic enough. Infact a reference to the Indian Ganges is used to heighten the romantic and exotic elements. Though the second stanza continues to be somewhat veiled yet it is less romantic. It insists upon sexual love. There is vindication of love and sexuality in it. The beauty of the Lady will disappear in the marble vault. The word 'marble' may be associated with the texture and loveliness of the living woman's skin, but here the lover stresses the time when that loveliness will be transferred to stone. The same type of transference of the lover's song, which finds no echoes in that vault, occurs in a veiled image of unrealized sexual union in life: worms will rape her in a way that the lover could not. His sensual desires for his mistress will change into ashes. There are many instances of the sexual motif which point to a degeneration from romantic convention in the first section to scarcely veiled explicitness in the last.

To conclude, a formalist reading of "To His Coy Mistress" can originate in a study of images and metaphors-here, space-time images.

**प्रश्न 3-स्वरूपात्मक उपागम के सन्दर्भ में 'To His Coy Mistress' का**