



Mycroft Lectures.
Adapted Transcript for:

Andrew Marvell's
To His Coy Mistress.

(Mycroft lectures always provide sentence-by-sentence parsing, paraphrasing and explanation of each poem. However, each lecture also presents extra information to enhance appreciation and understanding of the poem under discussion. As the Mycroft lectures are not read from a script, a transcript of a lecture contains the imperfections of a spoken presentation. To avoid the embarrassment of having the spoken performance thought to be an essay and being quoted as such, I have made occasional changes to the spoken lectures for the purposes of clarification. What follows is the transcript of a lecture, not an essay.)

Chronology of the Lecture.

1. The lecture begins with Marvell being situated as one of the metaphysical poets.
2. The poem is seen as Marvell's attempts to seduce a young lady. The lecture looks at how seriously we should take his attempts.
3. How should we hear the lines Marvell says?
4. Discussion of how the stress in a line can change the meaning of a line (using an example sentence, "Surely you aren't telling me to leave because they might arrive together again").
5. The poem is read through.
6. Discussion of the poem's title.
7. The poem is parsed, paraphrased, explained line by line in simpler English. Various complications noted, or areas of interest raised and questioned, are:

- The way each stanza of the poem presents a different strategy for seducing the Coy Mistress.
 - Biblical allusion in the poem.
 - The hyperbole of Marvell's flattery.
 - The significance of the omitted "If" at the start of the poem. The irony.
 - The aggression of the second stanza. Threatening or desperate?
 - Different ways of reading the lines (with sarcasm, seriousness, comedy).
 - The poem's use of "if", "but", and "therefore" to introduce each stanza.
 - The complication of the simile "like amorous birds of prey".
 - *Carpe diem*. Marvell's views on seizing certain moments from life when they are presented to us.
 - The power and the energy of the final lines.
 - Possible interpretations of the way the different stanzas should be read.
 - The poem as a metaphor for aspects of our own lives.
- 1 The poem is read through for a final time.

From the lecture: "The sentiment, the moral, of this isn't just about sex. It's about any area in our lives where we are given the opportunity to experience something new and possibly through cowardice, or timidity of coyness – affected shyness – neglect to do so."

Transcript of the *To His Coy Mistress* Lecture

Marvell wrote this in about 1650. This puts it at post-Shakespeare times in the history of English literature. He is situated among the metaphysical poets along with John Donne. The metaphysical poets are a loosely connected group of writers often, like most poetic

groups, situated more by geography and history than by any specific thing they were attempting to do. But I think it's fair to say that when we look at the metaphysical poets, I phrase it this way: "Metaphysical poets tend to investigate the world through witty yet rational discussions of its phenomena, rather than by intuition or mysticism." That definition - it could be argued against - but it covers a lot of the bases of what they're attempting to do, and Andrew Marvell is one of those guys. In this particular poem, *To His Coy Mistress*, which is justifiably his most famous one, he gives us a poem which I think is just great fun. It's really fun to analyze it. And it's fun because, and I don't want to sound like I'm attempting to be deliberately crass to come across as cool - but this is the way to look at the poem: in the poem - Andrew Marvell is trying to get laid. He's trying to seduce a young lady. And what's so much fun about this poem is the different strategies which he adopts to inveigle his way into her affections. One could say that these strategies are in fact very honest. It's not a love poem that attempts to say just, 'I say this to you, therefore I expect you to fall head over heels in love with me'. For example, if you've read John Donne's 'The Good Morrow', we expect the girl to fall head over heels in love with John Donne at the end of that poem. We expect him to be successful. We expect her to agree with what Donne has said. In this poem, we're not so sure. We're not so sure how the girl should respond to Andrew Marvell's affections, and we're not even so sure how seriously we should take his sincerity during his attempt to woo and win the girl.

This poem has a great complication in it, and by 'complication' I mean area of extreme interest. The things we're really interested in are nearly always those bits that are slightly more complicated than the easier things, I think. The area of interest in this poem, or the complication in this poem, take it how you will, is in how we hear the actual lines that Marvell says.

Do we hear them as sincere?

Do we hear them as angry?

Do we hear them even as, perhaps, sarcastic?

I'll try and say the lines when I do the sentence-by-sentence read-through for you. I'll try to say them in certain different ways to see how you can hear the rhetoric that Marvell is putting across, because the way that a line is said can be very important for our understanding of what is actually being said. And this is a great poem to demonstrate how that truth is manifest.

So, what I'll do in the way I teach this poem, I'll do the read-through, I'll then do a brief discussion on the actual title of the poem itself, and the different permutations of that, and how we could look at that. I'll then do the sentence-by-sentence read-through, and as I said, I'll try and draw attention to how we might interpret different lines through the way that we hear them being said. And finally, I'll address whether this poem is anything more to us, or can be read as anything more interesting to us, should it need to be, than merely Andrew Marvell attempting to seduce a young woman with various strategies. Is it just a poem written so that the poet can get laid? Or does it bring anything more for us to use? Aside from the possible seduction of young women ourselves, through using the lines that Marvell attempts, and some of the lines that Marvell uses in this, I would strongly suggest you don't use them to attempt to seduce anybody with.

Actually, because an appreciation of this poem is very dependent upon us recognizing that the lines in the poem can be said in different ways, let me briefly draw your attention here to the importance of recognizing how easily a simple stress on one line can change the tone of it. I'll take a line from one of Henrik Ibsen's plays, it's from 'Hedda Gabler', I think.

And the line is: "Surely you aren't telling me to leave because they might arrive together again."

That's the line, it's got thirteen words in it.

"Surely you aren't telling me to leave because they might arrive together again."

Listen to what happens when I stress different words in this. I'll stress the first one first.

"*Surely* you aren't telling me to leave because they might arrive together again."

We must assume we're at a party, and someone has come up to me and – you, in fact, have come up to me and told me to leave, because they might arrive together again.

And my response to it -

"*Surely* you aren't telling me to leave because they might arrive together again."

I'm affronted that you have told me to leave.

I'll stress the second word.

"Surely *you* aren't telling me to leave because they might arrive together again."

I'm affronted by the fact that you have told me to leave.

"Surely you *aren't* telling me to leave because they might arrive together again."

Different way of reading it, right?

'Telling'.

"Surely you aren't *telling* me to leave because they might arrive together again."

That one would work in a situation whereby the social conduct was to write me a letter to tell me to leave, but to actually speak to me to tell me to leave was a breach of etiquette.

'Me'.

"Surely you aren't telling *me* to leave because they might arrive together again."

See, there's a subtle difference to what's being conveyed each time I stress a different word.

'To' doesn't do anything.

"Surely you aren't telling me to *leave* because they might arrive together again."

That would imply that it'd be okay for me to go to another room, but for me to leave is terrible.

'Because' doesn't change much.

"Surely you aren't telling me to leave because *they* might arrive together again."

In that instance, my indignation is put towards the 'they'.

'Might'.

"Surely you aren't telling me to leave because they *might* arrive together again."

They might arrive, they might not. I'm being asked to leave just because they 'might' arrive together again.

"Surely you aren't telling me to leave because they might arrive *together* again."

So, if they arrive apart it's okay. If they arrive together, it's a problem.

And my personal favourite is this one:

"Surely you aren't telling me to leave because they might arrive together *again*."

You keep on telling me to leave because they might arrive together, and I keep ignoring you, and you've just told me again, and I'm going to ignore you once more.

"Surely you aren't telling me to leave because they might arrive together *again*."

The point of that is we don't know which one's the correct way of saying it. How would we? Some of them would depend on the context in which the line is said. But it demonstrates that in a simple line of thirteen words, there are lots of different ways of saying individual words to alter the setup of the line.

Now, in a poem like Andrew Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress*, the way that you say many of the lines in it, or in fact, the way that you hear many of the lines being said, is drastically going to alter your interpretation of what is being said in the poem. This was one line of me changing individual words in the line. When you come to a full poem, the tone with which you hear the words being said is going to be of extreme importance; especially in

this piece.

So, this great, fun piece, *To His Coy Mistress* by Andrew Marvell. This is the first read-through.

*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 love's long 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 the 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-chapt power.
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough the iron gates of life:*

Thus, though we cannot make our sun

Stand still, yet we will make him run.

There's some great bits in that. Okay. The title. The title *To His Coy Mistress*. So this is Andrew Marvell writing a poem to his mistress. 'Coy' mistress. Now, 'coy' - coyness is an affected shyness. If we describe a girl as coy, she is shy, but it's an affected shy, she's not really being shy. That's 'coy'. 'Mistress'. 'Mistress' means girlfriend or lover. So it's to his coy girlfriend. Except 'mistress' doesn't just mean girlfriend or lover. Mistress has a slight sadomasochistic element. In a sadomasochistic relationship, the mistress has more dominion over the male. And it's curious to know which one we should read the girl as in this. Do we read her as a silly, shy, little girl who he is trying to seduce? Or do we read her as a girl, or a woman, with affected shyness, who knows exactly what she's doing, who knows exactly what she's putting him through here, or at least Marvell suspects that she knows exactly what she's putting him through here, and we get the impression he quite likes that. 'To his coy mistress'. 'Coy', affected shyness. 'Mistress', either being lover or carrying a connotation of rather excitingly dominant sexual partner.

So, let's start off.

The first fascination of this poem is to do with the way each of the stanzas is going to present a different strategy for wooing, seducing, inveigling himself into the affections of the girl, the mistress. And he starts off by saying,

Had we but world enough, and time,

This coyness, Lady, were no crime.

It's quite a famous line, this.

'Had we but world enough, and time.' 'Had we' means 'if we had'. So, if we had world enough, and time enough, this coyness would be no crime. This coyness of yours, this affected shyness of yours, the way you're behaving, wouldn't be a problem, if we had world enough, and time. Now what he means by 'world enough, and time' is all of the time in the world, and basically, all of the world. So if we had forever to play with, and we had all of the world at our disposal, basically wasting time wouldn't matter, because we'd have world enough, and time.

It always reminds me of, well since I've seen the film, this bit reminds me of the film 'Inception'. The bit when Cobb and Mal, Leonardo DiCaprio and Marion Cotillards' characters, go far enough down into the dream world, so basically they've been there forever and they've created a whole world for themselves. They've had world enough, and time. So that's his point there.

If we had 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.

So basically, we can do anything we like, because we've got all the time in the world, and all the world to do it with. We can sit down, waste some time...

We would sit down and think which way

To walk and pass our long love's day.

So basically, we could sit around thinking about what we were going to do all day,

because they've got world enough, and time.

This whole poem is done in rhyming couplets, by the way, so I'll present each couplet to you and explain it.

*Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Shouldst rubies find: I by the tide
Of Humber would complain.*

So, what he means here is that she could be far away in India, looking for some rubies, while he would be closer to home on the Humber River in England, presumably complaining that he is at the Humber River in England, while she is out in India, which is a much more exciting place to be. But the point is that this wouldn't matter, because they've got world enough, and time. They can waste as much time as they like.

*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.*

Now what we have here is Biblical allusion. And the Biblical allusion is of course to Noah's flood, and to the expected conversion of the Jews to Christianity. I think this probably was written at a time when the idea that Jewish people could be converted to Christianity was thought to be something which was desirable, but was never going to happen. The idea 'I

would love you ten years before the Flood' means pretty much, before the dawn of time, I've got world enough, and time, so I could love you before the omnipotent deity decided to destroy the world with a flood. 'I would love you ten years before the Flood' could mean I would love you before, to use Christian mythology, ten years before Eden. (The dawn of time). But Eden doesn't rhyme or scan so well, so Marvell says, 'I would love you ten years before the Flood'.

And you should, if you please, refuse

Till the conversion of the Jews.

Now, I think 'Till the conversion of the Jews' is one of those things which is just not expected to ever happen. So 'I could love you from before the beginning of time 'til after the end of time'. It's a comic line, as if to say that if we had world enough, and time, it wouldn't matter, because we could even outlast the conversion of the Jewish people to Christianity. And we know that Jewish people are never going to convert to Christianity, but it wouldn't matter, because we've got world enough, and time at our disposal.

So I'll read that part again, just so we've got the sort of tone of what he's using in the opening stanza:

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.*

I certainly hear that last line as comic. Though, perhaps here it is sad. Totally up to you how you hear this.

*My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow*

he tells us. My vegetable love? This type of love that he would have for her, had he world enough and time, would be vegetable love. It would grow slowly, and it would grow vaster than empires. Now, the idea is that empires grow very big, but they grow very slowly; and his love for her would grow like that.

'Vegetable love'? I think it's rather tricky for us to - or rather, difficult, for us to - associate a positive connotation with 'vegetable love'. It's not exactly dynamic, particularly when it is going to be contrasted later with the 'amorous birds of prey' that he is going to speak of. 'Vegetable love' is certainly not related to us in a flattering way here.

But because he's got world enough and time, he has

*An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes and on thy forehead gaze;*

He's got world enough and time so he can praise her eyes for a hundred years. 'Oh

darling, you've got the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen. Oh, that is absolutely stunning. Your left eye is beautiful, I'm going to spend fifty years telling you what a beautiful left eye you have. And your right eye, your right eye, fifty years I'm going to explain...'

Pretty much I've got bored of that already.

The reality of this is that with one hundred years to flatter someone's eyes - the girl is surely going to get bored of it after a while. But that isn't really the point. This is hyperbole, isn't it? If I had all the world and time, I'd have all the time needed to waste flattering you over and over and over again.

An hundred years should go to praise

Thine eyes and on thy forehead gaze;

Two hundred to adore each breast

I'm sure she's got very nice breasts, but two hundred years each of flattery towards each breast seems a little bit excessive to me, and I'm fairly sure it seemed a little bit excessive to him when he was pitching this to the girl as a seduction technique.

Two hundred to adore each breast,

But thirty thousand to the rest;

30,000 years he's going to spend flattering the rest of her.

An age at least to every part

And the last age should show your heart.

So presumably his sentiment here is that 'I've got all the time in the world so I can flatter every little bit of you for years and years and years. And eventually, you will succumb to my desires because you have been sufficiently flattered. And this is what you deserve. You deserve to be this flattered, though in reality of course the girl would be bored to death after who knows how long.

'The last age should show your heart' means you would reveal your heart to me having fallen for me due to the excessive flattery I have given towards you, which I'm quite willing to do.

And the final couplet in that opening stanza is

*For, Lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.*

He is saying, this is what I would do 'if I had world enough and time'. And I would do it because you deserve it. It is worthwhile for me to spend years, years, years, hundreds of years flattering you because you're so beautiful. If we had world enough, and time.

Now of course, we have to come back to the first line, don't we? 'Had we but world enough, and time.' This is one of those conceits that you can start anything really romantic with. If we had . . .

One of my favorite poems is William Butler Yeats' *He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven*, which starts off:

*Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths*

Of night and light and the half-light,

I would spread the cloths under your feet:

If I these cloths - to which you could say, 'Well you don't, do you?' *If* you had these cloths, you would spread them under my feet, but since you don't have these cloths, it's not a particularly big deal saying what you would do if you did have them. 'If we had world enough and time, I would do this'. But since we haven't got world enough and time, it's not a really big deal you claiming that this is what you'd do if you did have it. 'If I had a million pounds, I would buy you a mansion. But I haven't actually got any money at the moment, can you lend me a fiver?' It's that type of thought process. Had we but world enough, and time. But you don't, do you?

And he knows that, and he ridicules, I think, or I think this is totally dependent, of course, on how you hear these words being said. And I can't hold a gun to your head and say that containing deliberate ridicule is definitely how you should hear these words, because I don't know. I suspect that there's a high degree of irony here in what he is saying, but I can only suspect it.

Marvell starts the second stanza:

But at my back I always hear

And you should have suspected that 'but' right at the start.

'If I had . . . but . . .'

But at my back I always hear

Time's winged chariot hurrying near.

Fantastic line.

But at my back I always hear

Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near.

He means time is passing quickly, and time is passing violently. It's as if a chariot was—I tend to associate chariots with Roman gladiatorial arenas. Chariots move quickly. But also, they tend to bring violence with them. Or at least in my associations with chariots. Behind me, I always hear time passing, and time is passing quickly, and above us, there's nothing we can do about it, it's a winged chariot, and violent.

And yonder all before us lie

Deserts of vast eternity.

So what we've got to look forward to is 'deserts of vast eternity'. Emptiness. A future of nothingness. Now this takes no account of a perspective of an after-life or anything. He's saying that in the future we've got to look forward to, there's just nothing there. And time is passing quickly.

But at my back I always hear

Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;

And yonder all before us lie

Deserts of vast eternity.

There's a certain beat to the rhythm, a movement to the rhythm which he gets going here. It speeds the story up as if he's becoming more aggressive, more desperate perhaps, in this second stanza and the way he is presenting his argument in the second stanza.

'Thy beauty shall no more be found', he tells her. 'So, in the future, basically you're not going to be as beautiful as you are now.'

*Thy beauty shall no more be found,
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound my echoing song.*

'Thy marble vault' will be the place that she will go when she dies. 'So, when you die, the song that I am saying to you now, which is basically that first stanza, at the point when you die, my song will echo around your burial chambers, the *marble vault* of your burial chambers, because you will be dead. You'll be unable to hear it.'

*Thy beauty shall no more be found,
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound my echoing song.*

If you don't love me now, and you were to die, the beauty of this song I am saying to you and the love which is carried with it will come to nothing.

And he then tries a new tack.

*Then worms shall try
That long preserved virginity.*

Now I'm not trying to sound crass here to come across as cool, but what he basically means

here is that your hymen, your long-preserved virginity, your hymen will be broken by worms and maggots crawling in and out of your vagina.

Has any woman ever been seduced by words more beautiful?

(If you're reading that and you don't understand sarcasm, trust me, that is sarcasm at its most obvious.)

That is literally what he is saying here. 'If you don't have sex with me now, and you were to die, worms will be crawling in and out of your vagina. Worms and maggots, and what a waste that would be.'

Worms shall try

That long preserved virginity,

And your quaint honour turn to dust.

So her honour is the preserved virginity. Notice the word 'quaint' here, which is definitely being used as a pejorative. If something is quaint, it is out of fashion, or old-fashioned, pointless, somewhat silly from a previous generation. The quaintness of her honour is going to turn to dust; just fly away in the wind. It won't benefit anyone.

'And into ashes all my lust', he tells her. 'All the lust which I feel for you now will just burn out.' 'Lust' will be like a fire, life-affirming, the fiery lust he feels for her. He continues that metaphor with the idea of ashes, that his lust will have burnt out and become nothing. It's violent stuff, actually. He's either sounding threatening to her, perhaps, or desperate. I mean, literally speaking, what he's saying is not wrong as well.

Then worms shall try that long preserved virginity.

And your quaint honour turn to dust,

And into ashes all my lust.

Anger could be one of the emotions with which I hear that being said. It's definitely not flattering to her.

He concludes this second stanza with the couplet,

*The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.*

And let me give you three ways to read that here.

Let's read it with sadness. And obviously if my acting capabilities aren't up to this, I apologize, but I'll give it the best shot I can.

*The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.*

Maybe you could hear it like that?

Let's try and hear it with anger.

*The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.*

Sarcasm. Let's try and read it with sarcasm.

*The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.*

Rising intonation on 'think'. 'None I *think* do there embrace' means that you hear it as sarcastic.

And it certainly sounds sarcastic to me, because we know that nobody embraces in the grave. But obviously, nobody there, nobody who's dead embraces. So he's basically saying in that second stanza, 'Look, we'd better have sex now, because if we don't, it will be a complete waste, and you're just going to die and rot away in a grave, and all of the passions we feel for each other, or at least that I feel for you at the moment, will come to nothing. And what a waste that would be.'

He begins the third stanza.

The third stanza, incidentally, begins with 'Now therefore'. So the poem starts with 'Had I', which basically is 'If. And so it's 'If' in the first stanza, 'But' in the second stanza, and 'Therefore' in the third stanza.

'If, but, therefore'.

If we could do this, this would happen; **but** we can't, **therefore**, we've got to do this.

That sounds flippant, but it's a way of convincing someone of something, isn't it? If we could, but we can't, therefore, we do this. Now as flippant as I'm sounding about this poem at the moment - and flippant doesn't necessarily mean that I don't think it's great, because I do, I think it's terrific. I think this third stanza is just beautiful. It's really, really well put together. And once again, there seems to be a different tack that he is moving with in order to attract the girl.

He says:

Now therefore, while the youthful hue

Sits on thy skin like morning dew,

which basically means while you are still young. In 'the youthful hue', the 'hue' is the colour. So you've still got the colours of youth on your cheek. He uses the simile, 'like morning dew'. Dew being there in the morning as a simile for youth. Dew is youthful in the morning. The girl is youthful.

While you're still young,

And while thy willing soul transpires

At every pore with instant fires

It's quite a comical line, this one, actually.

And while thy willing soul transpires

'Transpires' means, is there to be seen. So her willing soul, her actual willingness to have sex with him is easy to see.

Thy willing soul transpires

At every pore with instant fires.

She's really up for it. He can see that she's really sexually active and really wants him. He says. But she's just being coy. This is one of those, 'Go on, go on, you know you want to'

styles of argument, isn't it?

Thy willing soul transpires

At every pore with instant fires.

'You're desperate to have sex with me right now, you're just pretending to be coy' is what he's saying.

Now let us sport us while we may,

And now, like amorous birds of prey,

'Sport us' of course, means 'have sex'. Now let us have sex while we still can. The point being, while we're still young enough, vibrant enough, interested enough, enthusiastic enough, that sort of thing;

Now let us sport us while we may

You've got to love the next line as well. And now . . .

Now let us sport us while we may,

And now, (We'll do it right now!) Like amorous birds of prey.

When he is describing 'amorous birds of prey', I don't think he really means birds of prey having sex. Because I haven't really got any idea what hawks and eagles look like while they're mating. But I'm assuming, the image he manages to convey here is of amorous birds

of prey acting like birds of prey, really quickly, flying down at a victim. Or birds of prey also tearing things apart with their talons. He's talking about immediate, violent sexual activity. Which is of course being contrasted to the vegetable love he has discredited in the opening stanza.

My vegetable love should grow

Vaster than empires, and more slow.

Forget that! What we should do is sport us while we can, 'and now', like amorous birds of prey.

Rather at once our time devour

Than languish in his slow-chapt power.

It's quite a complicated line, this one. We should devour our time. We'll eat our time. We'll let our time nourish us.

Than languish in his slow-chapt power.

Time is given a gender, a he. And 'chapt' means teeth. So time is eating us. Which, as a metaphor, is fine. I mean, we're all getting older; time is eating us. But instead of allowing time to eat us, we will eat time. This is one of those *carpe diem* ideas. 'Seize the day'. Instead of languishing around, doing nothing, waiting to die, we will seize the moment while it's presented to us. Although time is trying to devour us, we will eat time itself. Time will be used to nourish our selves.

I certainly understand the sentiment that he's getting at here. And the bit that he writes from now on, I think is a terrific piece of poetry. I just love the drive and the energy that he manages to power this sentiment with. The words that he's using power the sentiment so well.

Let us roll all our strength and all

Our sweetness up into one ball.

So, everything that is good in us, everything that is life-affirming, our strength and our sweetness, we'll roll it up into one ball.

And tear our pleasures with rough strife

Thorough the iron gates of life:

I get the image of the iron gates being like prison gates, and we put all our energy together into one ball, and it rolls through the gates of life and we crash through the gates of life into the... once you crash through the gates of life, one might ask, where are you afterwards? But the power and the energy of the sentiment is not to be denied.

Let us roll all our strength and all

Our sweetness up into one ball,

And tear our pleasures with rough strife

Thorough the iron gates of life:

We'll seize all the living moments. This is very much like what Dylan Thomas advises his

father to do in *Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night*, isn't it? If you've seen the Mycroft Lecture that we've done on that one. 'Although it might not be easy for us to do it, there might be strife involved, it might be rough. We'll be tearing our pleasures, but the actual pleasure which we will get from the vibrant sexual activity which we are going to undergo, like birds of prey, will be used as a ball to break down the barriers of... for me, it's boredom.'

Thorough the iron gates of life:

As long as there's a gate there, that prevents you from getting somewhere, that's what's being knocked down. That's the metaphor he's trying to use here. 'Trying to use.' For me at least, he is using it incredibly successfully. We seize the day in each other's company. We eat the day for all its worth, get all the nourishment from it, and live the more exciting and vibrant life because we've done so.

And he comes up with the final couplet:

Thus, though we cannot make our sun

Stand still, yet we will make him run.

Now of course he's talking about the act of aging here. To make the sun stand still is to cease to age; and of course we can't cease to age.

We cannot make the sun stand still.

Yet we can make him run.

And for me, he means, 'we can make the sun run after us'. We can't make the sun stop, but

we can make it difficult for the sun to catch us. I mean literally it's nonsense, of course. But that's not the point, is it? That we will age, but we will not make it easy for the aging process to be upon us, because we will live the full and vibrant and exciting and sexually active life thus, as near as it is possible to do, defying age.

And of course, you can imagine . . . I get the impression of him looking up after delivering this poem to this girl, and thinking, 'Now, will you sleep with me?'

And he was doing okay in the first stanza. I think he was a bit sloppy and he was getting nowhere in the second stanza. There's just no way in the world the girl was going to sleep with him after that point. But I think he really pulls it back in the final stanza and I think he's definitely in with a chance of seducing the girl there after that brilliant final stanza.

Now, as crass - crass is the wrong word; as flippant as I'm being about the poem there, that is exactly what is going on in the poem, and that is the way to look at it. Though the main interest beyond what Andrew Marvell is telling us in the piece is to do with interpretation, how you hear those lines being said, and that is solely up to you. I would suggest that each stanza of the poem seems to be being said in different ways.

The first one, soporily, though perhaps very ironically; the second one, aggressively; also, perhaps, ironically; and the third one, the big guns of his argument, this is the bit he genuinely believes in. Either he'll be able to seduce her with this stanza, or he won't. As I say though, the degree of irony you hear in this is solely up to you.

But I think also, another area of this poem, particularly the last stanza, that's worth looking at is, is this *just* a poem about Andrew Marvell trying to seduce a young woman? I don't think it is, because I think what he addresses very blatantly in that final stanza about 'don't waste the moment which is presented to you', does he have to be talking about sex?

I don't think he does.

I think, for an easy comparison I could use, he could be talking about bungee-

jumping. He could be talking about anything whereby you feel slightly nervous or frightened about doing it, and he is - and I feel horrible about the fact that I'm just about to quote a Nike commercial - but it's the idea of 'Just do it'. You don't get that many opportunities for certain experiences in your life, and when that experience comes around, just do it. That's the point, or the moral, I suppose, of Andrew Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress*.

And in that, 'Thus, though we cannot make our sun stand still, yet we will make him run', this 'Seize the day' idea, this 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may', this 'time is passing so whenever opportunities come for you to enjoy them and experience something unusual and passionate, seize them as blatantly and obviously and powerfully and tightly and immediately as you can'. That sort of idea, I think does impact on us in our lives. As I say, the sentiment, the moral of this isn't just about sex. It's about any area in our lives where we are given the opportunity to experience something new, and possibly through cowardice or timidity or coyness - affected shyness - we neglect to do so.

I'll read the poem through one more time. This is Andrew Marvell's *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-chapt power.
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough the iron gates of life:
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.*

That was the final read-through from the Mycroft Online Lecture on Andrew Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress*.

I am Dr. Andrew Barker.

Thank you, goodbye.

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