



READING 2A Compare and contrast works of literature that express a universal theme. **3** Evaluate the changes in sound, form, and figurative language in poetry across literary time periods.

Metaphysical and Cavalier Poets

To His Coy Mistress

Poem by Andrew Marvell

To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time

Poem by Robert Herrick

To Althea, from Prison

Poem by Richard Lovelace

Meet the Authors

Andrew Marvell

1621–1678



Andrew Marvell is often grouped with Robert Herrick and Richard Lovelace as one of the Cavalier poets. They regarded Ben Jonson as their literary father, and like Jonson, they tried to imitate the grace and polish of classical Latin poetry. The Cavalier poets even referred to themselves as the “sons of Ben” or “tribe of Ben.” Marvell combined the lighthearted and melodious style of Cavalier poetry with the intellectual

depth and wit of metaphysical poetry.

During his lifetime, Marvell was known for his political activities rather than for his poetry. Unlike Herrick and Lovelace, he supported Parliament in the English Civil War of 1642–1651, and he served in Parliament from 1659 until his death. Marvell’s poetry was published posthumously; his true worth as a poet was not fully recognized until the 20th century.

Robert Herrick

1591–1674



Robert Herrick was an Anglican priest and an ardent admirer of Ben Jonson. An active member of London society, he was disappointed when assigned to a rural church in Devonshire in 1629. However, in 1646, under a parliamentary government, he was deprived of this post due to his loyalty to the king.

In 1648, he published his only book of poems, *Hesperides*. At the time, the

English were caught up in a civil war, and they showed little interest in Herrick’s light, playful verse. In 1662, Herrick was able to return to Devonshire, where he again settled down as a country priest and enjoyed a quiet life, although he wrote no more poetry. Today, critics appreciate Herrick’s poetry more; he has been called “the greatest songwriter ever born of English race.”

Richard Lovelace

1618–1657



Richard Lovelace was a courtier, soldier, poet, and connoisseur of the arts. He was born into a distinguished military family, and from early on, he was associated with the extravagant court of Charles I. At age 15 he became a “Gentleman Wayter Extraordinary” to the king, and at 18, he received an honorary masters degree from Oxford University. When conflict erupted between Charles I and Parliament, Lovelace

petitioned Parliament in the king’s favor and was imprisoned. While in prison, he wrote one of his most famous poems, “To Althea, from Prison.”

Authors Online



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LITERARY ANALYSIS: THEME

The **theme** of a poem is the central message the poet wishes to convey. The Cavalier poets were known for their themes about love, war, honor, and courtly behavior. They frequently advocated the philosophy of *carpe diem*, a Latin expression that means “seize the day,” or live for the moment. A poem famous for its theme of *carpe diem* is “To His Coy Mistress,” in which the speaker beseeches a young woman to be his love now because life is short. As you read each of the following poems, note the imagery, figurative language, and other descriptive details that help convey the poem’s theme.

READING SKILL: INTERPRET FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Often in reading poetry, you will need to interpret **figurative language**, or language that communicates ideas beyond the literal meanings of the words. The words in a figurative expression suggest rather than state information, thus helping to create an impression in the reader’s mind.

Metaphors, similes, and hyperbole are among the types of figurative language used in these poems. **Hyperbole** is any expression that greatly exaggerates facts or ideas for humorous effect or for emphasis. For example, in “To His Coy Mistress,” the speaker says that he would spend a “hundred years” praising his beloved’s eyes, which would be literally impossible, but figuratively it expresses the depth of his adoration.

Use the following strategies to interpret figurative meaning:

- Read each poem first to grasp its overall meaning.
- Then, ask questions about comparisons that are implied or directly stated. What is being compared, and how are these things alike?

As you read the poems, use a chart like the one shown to list examples of hyperbole, metaphor, and simile, and to record your interpretation of their meanings.

Poem	Figurative Language	Interpretation
“To His Coy Mistress”	Hyperbole: “My vegetable love should grow / Vaster than empires and more slow”	The speaker’s love will not dissipate in the future but continue to grow.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Should we LIVE for TODAY?

The Latin phrase *carpe diem* means literally “seize the day.” Many people subscribe to the idea that life is fleeting and that we should therefore focus on enjoyment of the present. But living for the moment can have its pitfalls too.

PRESENT Working with a partner, ask several friends and family members to identify the pros and cons of living for today. List all the responses you gather in a chart, and present your findings to your class. Which side seems to win out? What conclusion can you draw about people’s attitudes?

Living for the Moment	
Pros	Cons

To His Coy Mistress

Andrew Marvell

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
10 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;
15 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,
20 Nor would I love at lower rate.
But at my back I always hear
Time's wingéd chariot hurrying near; **A**
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
25 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 honor turn to dust,
30 And into ashes all my lust: **B**
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.

5 Ganges (gǎn'jēz'): a great river of northern India.

7 Humber: a river of northern England, flowing through Marvell's hometown; **complain:** sing melancholy love songs.

8 flood: the biblical Flood.

10 till . . . Jews: In Marvell's day, Christians believed that all Jews would convert to Christianity just before the Last Judgment and the end of the world.

11 vegetable love: a love that grows like a plant (an oak tree, for example)—slowly but with the power to become very large.

19 state: dignity.

A THEME

Reread lines 21–22.
Explain how these lines help convey the theme of *carpe diem*.

B FIGURATIVE MEANING

In lines 29–30, the speaker refers metaphorically to honor and lust as physical objects. What idea does this figurative language emphasize?



Lovers in a Landscape, Peter Lely. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Valenciennes, France. © Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York.

Now therefore, while the youthful hue
 Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
 35 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
 40 Than languish in his slow-chapped 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:
 45 Thus, though we cannot make our sun
 Stand still, yet we will make him run.

35 **transpires:** breathes.

40 **slow-chapped:** slow-jawed.

44 **thorough:** through.

To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time

Robert Herrick

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, **C**
Old time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying.

5 The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first,
10 When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,
And, while ye may, go marry;
15 For, having lost but once your prime,
You may forever tarry.

C FIGURATIVE MEANING
Figuratively speaking, what might the rosebuds in line 1 be a reference to?

Language Coach

Word Definitions *Former* (line 12) means “previous or past.” Paraphrase lines 11–12, starting with “and worst. . . .”

13 **coy**: hesitant; modest.

16 **tarry**: wait.

Literary Analysis

1. **Summarize** What argument does the speaker make in “To His Coy Mistress”?
2. **Clarify** In lines 9–12 of “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time,” what ideas does the speaker express about age?
3. **Compare Styles** In what ways are Marvell’s poem and Herrick’s poem similar in style? How do their styles differ?

To Althea, from Prison

Richard Lovelace

When Love with unconfined wings
Hovers within my gates, **D**
And my divine Althea brings
To whisper at the grates;
5 When I lie tangled in her hair
And fettered to her eye,
The gods that wanton in the air
Know no such liberty.

When flowing cups run swiftly round,
10 With no allaying Thames,
Our careless heads with roses bound,
Our hearts with loyal flames;
When thirsty grief in wine we steep,
When healths and draughts go free,
15 Fishes that tipple in the deep
Know no such liberty.

When, like committed linnets, I
With shriller throat shall sing
The sweetness, mercy, majesty,
20 And glories of my king;
When I shall voice aloud how good
He is, how great should be,
Enlargèd winds, that curl the flood,
Know no such liberty. **E**

25 Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage.
If I have freedom in my love,
30 And in my soul am free,
Angels alone, that soar above,
Enjoy such liberty.

D FIGURATIVE MEANING

What **metaphor** is introduced in lines 1 and 2?

7 **wanton**: sport; play.

10 **with no allaying Thames**: The Thames, a famous river running through London, is used here poetically to mean “water.”

14 **healths and draughts**: toasts and drinks.

17 **committed linnets**: caged songbirds. A linnet is a type of finch.

E THEME

Note the last line of each stanza so far. What might this **repetition** suggest about the poem’s theme?

Comprehension

1. **Clarify** How does the speaker feel when Althea comes to visit him?
2. **Summarize** What activities in prison give the speaker a sense of liberty?
3. **Summarize** Reread the last stanza of “To Althea, from Prison.” How does the speaker regard his imprisonment?



READING 2A Compare and contrast works of literature that express a universal theme. **3** Evaluate the changes in sound, form, and figurative language in poetry across literary time periods.

Literary Analysis

4. **Interpret Figurative Language** Interpret and explain the following lines from the poems:
 - lines 38–40 from “To His Coy Mistress”
 - lines 3–4 from “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time”
 - lines 25–26 from “To Althea, from Prison”
5. **Analyze Theme** In “To His Coy Mistress” and “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time,” which images of nature do the poets use to express the passing of time and the theme of *carpe diem*?
6. **Make Generalizations About Speakers** Think about the ways in which women are described in “To His Coy Mistress,” “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time,” and “To Althea, from Prison.” How would you characterize each speaker’s attitude toward women? What generalizations can you make about this aspect of Cavalier poetry? Use a chart to make your responses.
7. **Compare Texts** In your opinion, what would each of the speakers of these poems think of the kind of love described in Donne’s “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” (page 518)? Support your answer with evidence from the poems.

<i>Speaker’s Attitude Toward Women</i>	
<i>First Poem:</i>	
<i>Second Poem:</i>	
<i>Third Poem:</i>	
↓	
<i>Generalizations:</i>	

Literary Criticism

8. **Different Perspectives** Some literary critics have stated that female and male readers are likely to respond differently to “To His Coy Mistress.” Do you agree with this observation? Explain why, and cite evidence from the text to support your answer.

Should we **LIVE for TODAY?**

Because time is fleeting, Herrick and Marvell encourage us to seize the day, or live for the moment. What are some ways to actively do this?

Metaphysical Conceits

The metaphysical poets and, to a lesser extent, the Cavalier poets who followed them shared a love for elaborate conceits—extended metaphors that make a surprising connection between two very dissimilar things. John Donne was the master of this technique. Reread this example of one such conceit from Donne’s “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning.”

*“If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if th’ other do.”*

Donne compares the souls of two separated lovers to the feet of a compass that turn in sync with one another; when one moves, so does the other, for they remain attached. Metaphysical conceits require imagination on the part of the reader, who must think carefully to understand the connection being made by the comparison.

Writing to Evaluate

The metaphysical poets’ use of such fanciful and extended conceits led the writer and critic Samuel Johnson to complain about their “violent yoking together of heterogeneous ideas.” What is your opinion of metaphysical conceits? Do you agree with Johnson that the comparisons are artificial and forced? Or do you find the comparisons add depth or complexity to your understanding? Cite specific lines from Donne’s writing to support your opinion.

Consider

- the nuances of each comparison
- the choice of words and images Donne uses in making each comparison
- whether, in your opinion, the conceits add to or detract from the work’s overall theme

Extension Online

INQUIRY & RESEARCH

Samuel Johnson was only one of many literary critics who commented upon the work of John Donne and the metaphysical poets. Many critics did not care for the elaborate conceits and rough meter characteristic of metaphysical poetry, while others praised the poets’ complexity of ideas. Search the Internet for literary criticism on the metaphysical poets. Then, with your classmates, create a classroom poster with the most intriguing critical comments, positive and negative.



WRITING 15C Write an interpretation of a literary text.

