



## Andrew Marvell: Poems Summary and Analysis of "To His Coy Mistress"

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**Introduction :** If human life were not limited by space and time, the beloved's coyness would not harm the lover and the beloved. They would sit and plan how to pass their long time. The beloved would be by the side of the Indian Ganges and the lover by the side of the Humber in England. She could refuse him as long as she pleased. His love would grow larger slowly.

ISSN : 2348-5612 © URR



He would praise every part of her body spending a lot of time because she is so beautiful and his love is so deep. But the poet (the lover) is followed by endless thoughts of the ever-nearing chariot whose wheels are always audible. There is no escape from the life and the laws of time. In front, of him there is the stillness, the barrenness of the eternity. Time makes her old and she will die. Then she will no longer be beautiful. Her dead body will be eaten by the worms. Her honor will turn into dust and his lust also will pass away. Although she will be in her private place in the grave, yet nobody will embrace her there.

Therefore when she is young, beautiful, active, they should amuse each other. Instead of acting slowly, they should act quickly. They should gather all their strength and sweetness. They should fight to get pleasure. Although they cannot stop the time they will enjoy while it is passing. The speaker in 'To His Coy Mistress' has expressed his tender feeling of love to his coy Mistress. He inspires us to enjoy love as long as we live in this world. The poet means to say that we should enjoy love within the limited time. The lifetime of a man is very short. In this short life a person should enjoy his life with his love partner. He prefers to pass some time by the side of the river Ganga. He would like to nourish her love till ten years before the destruction of the world by flood, though his beloved may refuse it even before the prophecy of destruction of the Jews.



The poet has compared his love to vegetable in respect of quick growth. As vegetable grows quickly so he wishes that his love with his coy mistress should grow and develop vaster than empires. He won't like to praise her eyes and forehead for hundred years. He would feel pleasure in enjoying her each breast for two hundred years and for the rest part of her body he would be praising her for thirty thousand years. He would regard her as a body of higher rate nor of lower rates. So he encourages her to taste the pleasure of love without any delay and without the feelings of shame and hesitation.

### **Summary:**

The poem is spoken by a male lover to his female beloved as an attempt to convince her to sleep with him. The speaker argues that the Lady's shyness and hesitancy would be acceptable if the two had "world enough, and time." But because they are finite human beings, he thinks they should take advantage of their sensual embodiment while it lasts.

He tells the lady that her beauty, as well as her "long-preserved virginity," will only become food for worms unless she gives herself to him while she lives. Rather than preserve any lofty ideals of chastity and virtue, the speaker affirms, the lovers ought to "roll all our strength, and all / Our sweetness, up into one ball." He is alluding to their physical bodies coming together in the act of lovemaking.

### **Analysis:**

Marvell wrote this poem in the classical tradition of a Latin love elegy, in which the speaker praises his mistress or lover through the motif of *carpe diem*, or "seize the day." The poem also reflects the tradition of the erotic blazon, in which a poet constructs elaborate images of his lover's beauty by carving her body into parts. Its verse form consists of rhymed couplets in iambic tetrameter, proceeding as AA, BB, CC, and so forth.

The speaker begins by constructing a thorough and elaborate conceit of the many things he "would" do to honor the lady properly, if the two lovers indeed had enough time. He posits impossible stretches of time during which the two might play games of courtship. He claims he could love her from ten years before the Biblical flood narrated in the Book of Genesis, while the



Lady could refuse his advances up until the “conversion of the Jews,” which refers to the day of Christian judgment prophesied for the end of times in the New Testament’s Book of Revelations.

The speaker then uses the metaphor of a “vegetable love” to suggest a slow and steady growth that might increase to vast proportions, perhaps encoding a phallic suggestion. This would allow him to praise his lady’s features – eyes, forehead, breasts, and heart – in increments of hundreds and even thousands of years, which he says that the lady clearly deserves due to her superior stature. He assures the Lady that he would never value her at a “lower rate” than she deserves, at least in an ideal world where time is unlimited.

Marvell praises the lady’s beauty by complimenting her individual features using a device called an erotic blazon, which also evokes the influential techniques of 15th and 16th century Petrarchan love poetry. Petrarchan poetry is based upon rarifying and distancing the female beloved, making her into an unattainable object. In this poem, though, the speaker only uses these devices to suggest that distancing himself from his lover is mindless, because they do not have the limitless time necessary for the speaker to praise the Lady sufficiently. He therefore constructs an erotic blazon only to assert its futility.

The poem’s mood shifts in line 21, when the speaker asserts that “Time’s winged chariot” is always near. The speaker’s rhetoric changes from an acknowledgement of the Lady’s limitless virtue to insisting on the radical limitations of their time as embodied beings. Once dead, he assures the Lady, her virtues and her beauty will lie in the grave along with her body as it turns to dust. Likewise, the speaker imagines his lust being reduced to ashes, while the chance for the two lovers to join sexually will be lost forever.

The third and final section of the poem shifts into an all-out plea and display of poetic prowess in which the speaker attempts to win over the Lady. He compares the Lady’s skin to a vibrant layer of morning dew that is animated by the fires of her soul and encourages her to “sport” with him “while we may.” Time devours all things, the speaker acknowledges, but he nonetheless asserts



that the two of them can, in fact, turn the tables on time. They can become “amorous birds of prey” that actively consume the time they have through passionate lovemaking

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