

To his coy mistress by Andrew Marvel



BIRTH 31 Mar 1621Winestead, East Riding of Yorkshire Unitary Authority, East Riding of Yorkshire, England

DEATH 16 Aug 1678 (aged 57)London, City of London, Greater London, England

BURIAL [St Giles in the Fields Churchyard](#)
Holborn, London Borough of Camden, Greater London, England

MEMORIAL ID 8260 · [View Source](#)

By:-
Dr. Ritu Mittal
Assistant professor
JKP(PG) College Muzaffarnagar



Brief Introduction to the Poem

Andrew Marvell is one of the most renowned poets of the metaphysical school of poetry and a great name in the Literary Canon. Several critics have focused their studies on the metaphysical aspect of Marvell's poems but not much has been explored and said in the context of gender. This paper intends to capture Marvell's gender biases and the suppression of the female persona in his most celebrated poem, "To His Coy Mistress". This paper also slightly touches upon the rape culture that Marvell has, to some extent, initiated. In the process of exposing the oppressor, the paper entirely deconstructs the image of the „beloved“ and makes her silence appear a symbol of her strength. KEYWORDS- feminist, woman, sexual, silence, patriarchal.



Brief Introduction to the Poem

"To His Coy Mistress" is a [Cavalier poem](#) written by the [English](#) author and politician [Andrew Marvell](#) (1621–1678) either during or just before the [English Interregnum](#) (1649–60). It was published posthumously in 1681.^[2]

This poem is considered one of Marvell's finest and is possibly the best recognized [carpe diem](#) poem in English. Although the date of its composition is not known, it may have been written in the early 1650s. At that time, Marvell was serving as a tutor to the daughter of the retired commander of the [New Model Army](#), [Sir Thomas Fairfax](#).^[3]

"To His Coy Mistress" had been received by many as a poem that follows the traditional conventions of carpe diem love poetry. Some modern critics, however, argue Marvell's use of complex and ambiguous [metaphors](#) challenges the perceived notions of the poem. It as well raises suspicion of [irony](#) and deludes the reader with its inappropriate and jarring [imagery](#).^[4]

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Summary of the Poem

He associates his mistress with frailty, delicacy, and sheepish modesty. "Let us roll our strength and all/ Our sweetness up into one ball..." (Ferguson, 436) The common idea of "strength" as a masculine attribute and "sweetness" as synonymous to the „feminine nature“ is evident in the poem. Marvell's idea of measuring female worth by physical attractiveness is sure to anger the equality feminists who believe that biological and physical differences between the two sexes do not justify the discrimination against women and that there is no reason why men should consider themselves superior to women. "The Second Sex argued that there was no such thing as „feminine nature“." (Waugh, 320) This dismisses Marvell's claim of his mistress being coy. It is perhaps his male ego that confuses rejection with coyness



Use of Gender Discrimination in the Poem

Marvell's verse is not an account of a delightful romance but instead is an outright rape threat. He has woven his perversity slowly and carefully in his verse, blanketing it first with beguiling platonic promises and then by harsh sexual imagery. A feminist reading of "To His Coy Mistress" is of great necessity as Marvell belonged to that Great Literary Cannon which authored books by men for men and also for those women who succumb to the male point of view and start to think like a male. "Such a process Judith Fetterley calls „the immasculation of women by men. As readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values.“" (Duyfhuizen, 415) Patriarchy has always been an underlying strain that runs through the texts of Andrew Marvell and the female voice is often seen silenced in his verses. His most celebrated poem, "To His Coy Mistress" is an incontestable example of gender discrimination and the patriarchal notion that traps women and forces on them certain gender rules. Marvell's Mistress is „coy" and „coyness" is supposedly a significant part of the „feminine nature"



Meaning of Feminism

Feminism is a social movement and ideology that fights for the political, economic and social rights for women. Feminists believe that men and women are equal, and women deserve the same rights as men in society. The feminist movement has fought for many different causes, such as the right for women to vote, the right to work and the right to live free from violence.

But men and women are already equal. Although women have gained a lot in the past century, there is still inequality in many areas in Australia. Here are some statistics to think about:

- Women working full-time in Australian earn on average 17.5 % less than men working full-time.
- Women are 50% of the population, but make up only 26% of representatives in Australian parliament.
- 1 in 3 women worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.



Feminism applied to the poem

In "[To His Coy Mistress](#)," the poem's narrator is trying to persuade his girlfriend to have sex with him. He does this by using the carpe diem or "seize the day" theme, saying to her that they don't have all the time in the world, for at any time they could die. If he had world enough and time, the narrator says, he would spend 200 years praising each of his beloved's breasts and 30,000 years lavishing praise on the rest of her body. He would take her to India, at that time an immensely long journey from England, and once there, would lounge with her by the Ganges River and find her rubies. However, he says, there just isn't time for all this.

A feminist lens would focus on what is at stake for an unmarried woman in that time and place. She would have no access to reliable birth control, because there was none, and, in that culture, would be shamed and dishonoured were she to become pregnant without being married



Feminism Underlying in the Poem To His Coy Mistress

"To His Coy Mistress" is a metaphysical, carpe diem poem by English author Andrew Marvell. It dates to the mid-17th century. It's also a seduction poem, in which an ostensibly male speaker attempts to convince a woman to have sex with him. The poem's main argument is that since they both desire one another, and since mortality is horrific and inevitable, the two should have sex..

1. Feminism is defined as the belief in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes
2. The goal of feminism is to challenge the systemic inequalities women face on a daily basis.
3. Contrary to popular belief feminism has nothing to do with belittling men, in fact feminism does not support sexism against either gender. Feminism works towards equality, not female superiority



Thank you