

Andrew Marvell

To His Coy Mistress

Had we but world enough, and time,
This [coyness](#),¹ Lady, were no crime.
We would sit down and think [which way](#)
[To walk](#)² and pass our long love's day.
Thou by the Indian [Ganges](#)³ side.....5
Shouldst [rubies](#)⁴ find: I by the tide
Of [Humber](#)⁵ would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the [Flood](#),
[And you should, if you please, refuse](#)
[Till the conversion of the Jews](#).⁶.....10
My [vegetable love](#)⁷ 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,.....15
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](#),⁸
Nor would I love at lower rate.....20

But at my back I always hear
[Time's wingèd chariot](#)⁹ hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found,.....25
Nor, in thy [marble vault](#),¹⁰ shall sound
My echoing song: then [worms](#)¹¹ shall try
That long preserved virginity,
And your [quaint](#)¹² honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust:.....30
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](#),¹³
 And while thy willing soul [transpires](#)¹⁴35
 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](#)¹⁵ power.....40
 Let us roll all our strength and all
 Our sweetness up into one ball,
 And tear our pleasures with rough strife
[Thorough](#)¹⁶ the iron gates of life:
 Thus, though we cannot make our sun.....45
 Stand still, yet we will make him run.

Notes

- 1.....[coyness](#): Evasiveness, hesitancy, modesty, coquetry, reluctance; playing hard to get.
- 2.....[which . . . walk](#): Example of enjambment (carrying the sense of one line of verse over to the next line without a pause).
- 3.....[Ganges](#): River in Asia originating in the Himalayas and flowing southeast, through India, to the Bay of Bengal. The young man here suggests that the young lady could postpone her commitment to him if her youth lasted a long, long time. She could take real or imagined journeys abroad, even to India. She could also refuse to commit herself to him until all the Jews convert to Christianity. But since youth is fleeting (as the poem later points out), there is no time for such journeys. She must submit herself to him now.
- 4.....[rubies](#): Gems that may be rose red or purplish red. In folklore, it is said that rubies protect and maintain virginity. Ruby deposits occur in various parts of the world, but the most precious ones are found in Asia, including Myanmar (Burma), India, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and Russia.
- 5.....[Humber](#): River in northeastern England. It flows through Hull, Andrew Marvell's hometown.
- 6.....[Flood. . . Jews](#): Resorting to hyperbole, the young man says that his love for the young lady is unbounded by time. He would love her ten years before great flood that Noah outlasted in his ark (Gen. 5:28-10:32) and would still love her until all Jews became Christians at the end of the world.
vegetable love: love cultivated and nurtured like a vegetable so that it flourishes prolifically
- 8.....[this state](#): This lofty position; this dignity.

- 9....Time's wingèd chariot: In Greek mythology, the sun was personified as the god Apollo, who rode his golden chariot from east to west each day. Thus, Marvell here associates the sun god with the passage of time.
- 10...marble vault: The young lady's tomb.
- 11...worms: a morbid phallic reference.
- 12...quaint: Preserved carefully or skillfully.
- 13...dew: The 1681 manuscript of the poem uses *glew* (not *dew*), apparently as a coined past tense for *glow*.
- 14...transpires: Erupts, breaks out, emits, gives off.
- 15...slow-chapt: Chewing or eating slowly.
- 16...Thorough: Through.

Summary

Andrew Marvell is known for his odd writing style and beautifully metaphysical poetry. He writes about love and life, and plays with elements of time and space. He is most famous for his poem “To His Coy Mistress.” Published posthumously and a fine example of his writing style, “To His Coy Mistress” has inspired much discussion. The poem concerns love, romance, and the aphorism “carpe diem” – living life to the fullest.

As the poem begins, the speaker is talking about the woman of his dreams. He has attempted many times to court her, but she has shown no interest. In the first stanza, the speaker explains that if he were not constrained by time, by a normal lifespan, he would be able to show her how eternal and deep his love is. He would love her and admire every part of her body intimately. He would admire her eyes for a hundred years, and then take two hundred to admire each breast. He would spend thirty thousand years to admire the rest of her, leaving an entire age to give her his heart. He also tells her that with this limitless time, he would never tire of her resistance and rejection of his advances, and that her coyness would never dissuade him from trying to spend all of eternity together.

In the second stanza, he sadly speaks of the brevity of life, personifying time in a titan-like fashion: “at my back I always hear Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near.” In death, there is no love or romance; he attempts to persuade her to love him by reminding her how short human life is, that their time to be together is brief, and they must hurry to enjoy one another before it is over.

In the third stanza, Marvell writes, “Now let us sport us while we may, and now, like amorous birds of prey.” This stanza is another attempt to get this woman to fall for him. He almost begs her to change her mind, to requite his loving efforts so they can spend the rest of what little time they have together. He does this by using a variety of powerful and almost jarring metaphors. The speaker ends his lament with, “though we cannot make our sun stand still, yet we will make him run,” meaning, although he is unable to stop time, if they were together, they would be so happy that time would fly by.

Critics have called this poem a powerful love story, praising it for its romantic and self-sacrificing elements, where the speaker would truly do anything for the subject. However, delving deeper, critics have found that Andrew Marvell is a master of sarcasm and irony. The metaphors in this poem uttered by other would be great declarations of love. However, Marvell uses such vivid imagery and words to portray ridiculousness. The poem depends on capricious and whimsical phrases that sound less serious and more ironic. The poet uses many death metaphors in the second stanza: “thy marble vault, shall sound my echoing song,” “worms shall try that long preserved virginity,” “into ashes all my lust,” and “the grave's a fine and private place.” These vividly worded metaphors lend irony as the speaker uses the threat of death to woo this woman.

“To His Coy Mistress” is a structured poem written in iambic tetrameter, its rhymes in couplets. Poets, many of whom borrowed phrases such as “world enough and time” and “vaster than empires and more slow,” have praised the poem. Contemporary authors, such as B. F. Skinner and Stephen King, have borrowed lines from the poem to illustrate their characters’ fear of the brevity of life. Other poets, including Anne Finch and A. D. Hope, have written poems from the female subject’s point of view in response to Marvell. Though it was published more than three hundred years ago, its themes still resonate today

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.

Historical Context

"To His Coy Mistress" was likely written in the 1650s, during a period of significant political turmoil in English society. In the 1640s, the nation had endured a bloody civil war. The civil war was provoked by religious and political tensions, especially between radical Protestants and more conservative Anglicans. But it quickly became a broader conflict over the nature of government itself, with Royalists—who supported the monarchy and the Anglican Church—pitted against Parliamentarians—who supported a democratic form of government and a Puritan church. The civil war culminated with the execution for

treason of the King, Charles I, in 1649. Oliver Cromwell, a Parliamentarian, assumed control of the government for most of the 1650s—a period called the "Interregnum." Marvell himself was an active participant in these events. Though he spent the war in Italy and France, working as the tutor for a noble British family, he returned to England in the early 1650s, living for several years at Nun Appleton Hall near York (where he wrote his famous poem, "Upon Appleton House") and later served as Latin Secretary, alongside the poet John Milton—an important role in Cromwell's national government. He joined Parliament in 1659, representing Kingston-Upon-Hull. After the restoration of the monarchy in the 1660s, Marvell managed to escape punishment for his participation in the revolutionary government, and he worked to prevent the new king, Charles II, from executing John Milton. Important as this political turmoil is to Marvell's life—and his writing—it is notably absent from "To His Coy Mistress." In the poem, Marvell's speaker seems to have withdrawn from all such political complications; he experiences love apart from the politics of the world in which he lives.

Themes

Love and Death

"To His Coy Mistress" is a love poem: it celebrates beauty, youth, and sexual pleasure. However, the speaker of the poem is haunted by mortality. Though he imagines a luxuriously slow love that takes thousands of years to reach consummation, he knows such a thing is impossible: he will die before it can be accomplished. Death cannot be delayed or defeated; the only response to death, according to the speaker, is to enjoy as much pleasure as possible before it comes. He urges the woman he loves not to wait, to enjoy the pleasures of life without restraint. The poem draws a contrast between two kinds of love: the full, rich love that would be possible if everyone lived forever, and the rushed, panicked love that mortal beings are forced to enjoy.

The first stanza of the poem poses a question and explores a hypothetical world: what would love be like if humans had infinite time to love? In response, the speaker imagines a world of unlimited pleasure. For example, he describes his mistress finding precious stones on the banks of the Ganges; he describes himself spending two hundred years praising a single part of her body.

The key to this paradise, then, is that the normal limitations of human life have been removed. The sheer length of the mistress's and the speaker's lives allows them to delay consummation of their love indefinitely: the speaker announces that his mistress might "refuse / 'Till the conversion of the Jews"—which, in the Christian theology of Marvell's time, was expected to occur during the biblical Last Days. In this ideal world, the speaker feels no urgency to consummate their relationship.

The speaker has no questions about whether his mistress deserves this long courtship, but he does have qualms about its viability. He is, he notes at the start of stanza 2, always conscious of the passage of time—and thus of the fact that both he and his mistress will eventually die. Stanza 2 diverges from the beautiful dream of stanza 1, reflecting instead on the pressing, inescapable threat of death.

Death, as the speaker imagines it, is the opposite of the paradise presented in stanza 1: instead of endless pleasure, it offers “deserts of vast eternity.” The speaker’s view of death is secular; he is not afraid of going to Hell or being punished for his sins. Instead, he fears death because it cuts short his and his mistress’s capacity to enjoy each other. In death, he complains, her beauty will be lost and—unless she consents to have sex before she dies—her virginity will be taken by worms. The language of this stanza is grotesque. This is a poem of seduction, but it feels profoundly unsexy. The speaker’s horror of death overshadows his erotic passion, but it also makes the speaker seem more sincere: while at first it might seem that the speaker is saying all these things primarily because he just wants to have some sex, the despair in the poem implies that the speaker’s arguments are not mere rhetorical statements but rather deeply held beliefs and fears.

In the final stanza of the poem, the speaker finally announces his core argument: since death is coming—and since it will strip away the pleasures of the flesh—his mistress should agree to have sex with him soon. What’s more, he imagines that their erotic “sport” will offer compensation for the pain and suffering of life. “Our pleasures,” he argues, will tear through “the iron gates of life.” Though he does not imagine that their pleasure will defeat death, he does believe that pleasure is the only reasonable response to death. Indeed, he even says that enjoying pleasure is a way to defy death. However, the grotesque language of stanza 2 may overwhelm the poem’s insistence on the power of pleasure. If sexuality is a way to contest the power of death, it nonetheless seems—even in the speaker’s own estimation—that death is an overwhelming, irresistible force.

Symbols

Heart

The speaker spends much of stanza 1 imagining that he will spend eternity slowly, luxuriously describing and praising each part of his mistress’s body. His focus is on physical features and physical beauty: her forehead, eyes, and breasts. Line 18:

And the last age should show your *heart*.

The speaker turns to the mistress’s “heart.” One hopes this is not literal: that he does not plan to cut into her chest and describe the organ itself. Rather, the heart functions symbolically here, representing the mistress’s innermost character. The use of the

symbol—and the timing of its introduction—suggest some important things about the utopian world the speaker imagines in this stanza. In this world, the mistress can delay revealing her true self until the very end of time. Though the speaker continues to love her, passionately, she does not have to reciprocate until she's good and ready. It also suggests something about what's at stake for the speaker: he wants to have his mistress's heart, hinting at a genuine romantic love rather than simple lust. This is a rather chaste desire: the rest of the poem is much more explicit. The speaker withholds the full force of his desire here, early in the poem, restraining his more sexual ambitions until much later.

Deserts of vast eternity

In line 24, "*Deserts of vast eternity*" the speaker compares death to "deserts of vast eternity." The deserts he has in mind are not literal spaces. Instead, they represent time itself, symbolically. In using this symbol, the speaker draws on a key tradition in western thought. Deserts are important spaces in western religion and art. In Christianity, for example, the desert is often a space of trial and tribulation. Jesus, for example, is tempted by Satan in the desert. (This temptation forms the subject of a poem by Marvell's close friend, John Milton—*Paradise Regained*). And the early saints of Christianity often retreated to the desert to attain spiritual clarity and to live free of sin.

Marvell's speaker, however, consciously rejects this tradition: instead of being a space of religious meaning, it is a blank and empty space, devoid of pleasure, devoid of content. It does not contain either the punishment or the paradise that Christians expect after death. It belongs, in other words, to a surprisingly secular worldview: one in which death is an absolute end with nothing beyond it. This view of the world suits Marvell's speaker, since he wants to convince his mistress to have sex with him immediately, without saving her honor for the afterlife. The desert thus symbolizes the speaker's nihilistic, even atheistic beliefs about the afterlife, and it also marks the extent to which he has turned his back on the traditional images of Christianity.

Dust and Ashes

At the end of stanza 2, the speaker notes that, in the grave, his mistress's virginity (and the honor it represents) will "turn to dust."

*And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust.*

Death reduces something vital and living to an inert substance. Dust is an important symbol of death and decay in the history of western thought: for example, casting Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, God announces to them, "For dust thou art and to dust thou shall

return." To be mortal, in this Biblical framework, is to be made of dust. Life itself is only a temporary escape from being dust. The speaker extends and even subverts this traditional symbol. In his account, it is not the mistress's body but her honor which is dust. Honor is an abstract concept, a social convention, rather than something physical. But the speaker's use of the symbol suggests that it does have material value. He makes this claim strategically, to support his argument. Honor, he suggests, is just as fragile as the body. Like the body, it will be devoured by death. There is no sense in trying to preserve it, since it will turn to nothing as soon as death comes.

In this sense, the symbol is similar to, but also different from, the "ashes" that appear in the next line. It is traditional to invoke ashes when discussing lust: lust is like a fire, and like a fire it burns out. Like the dust in the previous line, death reduces a vital, living force to an inert substance. However, Marvell is content to employ the symbol of ashes in a relatively traditional way, in contrast to his subversive discussion of dust in the previous line.

Morning dew

Sits on thy skin like morning dew,

In line 34, the speaker compares the mistress's youthful skin to "morning dew." Dew is often used as a symbol for youth—and for fragility. Dew is a liquid that appears on plants and grasses in the morning, as the temperature changes. It generally evaporates as the sun rises, disappearing by mid-morning. These properties make it an attractive symbol for poets to use. Human life is often compared to a day, with the morning symbolizing youth and the evening symbolizing old age. The dew seems almost an ideal symbol for youth itself: the way it is beautiful and delicate; the way it evaporates quickly as life progresses. Here, the speaker uses the symbol in this traditional—indeed, almost clichéd—sense.

Form, Meter, & Rhyme Scheme

Form

"To His Coy Mistress" is a poem in rhyming iambic tetrameter couplets, as the poem's first two lines establish. There are no evident restrictions on the stanza length: some stanzas are longer than others. Though the poem is in form, it is not in a fixed or inherited form; Marvell seems to have generated the form specifically for the poem. Indeed, the poem seems to playfully resist the expectations that its early readers would've had about proper form. In the 17th and 18th centuries, English poets often wrote in a form called "heroic verse:" rhymed iambic pentameter couplets. As its name suggests, this kind of verse was often reserved for heroic subjects: battles, epic journeys, etc. Marvell's poem falls just short of this heroic meter. Marvell seems to be winking at his reader. The poem is *almost* heroic: he comes close to taking himself seriously, but backs off. In contrast with heroic verse,

which often feels stately and dignified, "To His Coy Mistress" seems punchy and fast-paced: the missing foot in each line makes the poem feel lighter, smoother, and less serious.

Though the poem contains a number of metrical variations, it maintains its light, fast-paced rhythm throughout, coupling this rhythm with strong end rhymes. The slight hiccups in the rhythm exist mostly for variety and do not significantly affect the reader's experience of the poem. More interesting are the variations in the poem's conceptual organization. Frequently, the speaker organizes his thoughts into two-line segments, again shown in the poem's first two lines. Notice that the speaker's thought begins at the start of line 1 and ends at the end of line 2. A new thought begins at the start of line 3. (Occasionally, the speaker will extend his thought beyond the boundaries of the couplet—while maintaining the couplet as the basic structure of his ideas. This happens in lines 41-44, which make one complete thought, broken up into two parts, with a couplet for each). The speaker breaks this pattern occasionally in the poem, sometimes in moments when he loses his composure, or when he wants to emphasize a point. One can find a case of the latter in line 37: "Now let us sport us while we may." The line is conceptually discrete from the lines around it. It sticks out. And for good reason: it is the poem's thesis statement, its main point. The speaker isolates it exactly so that it stands out.

In addition to the careful conceptual organization of the poem's ideas into couplets, the poem's overall argument is organized into three sections, each of which gets its own stanza. The poem functions like a **sylogism**. In the first stanza, the speaker proposes a hypothetical: "What if..." In the second stanza, he demonstrates why the hypothetical is impossible: "But..." In the final stanza, he demonstrates the consequences of his demonstration: "Therefore..." The poem thus reads like a three-part sentence: "If...but...therefore." This structure contributes to the feeling that the poem is trying to persuade; it takes the form of a logical argument.

Meter

"To His Coy Mistress" is in iambic tetrameter throughout—an unusual meter on its own. (It does commonly appear in **ballad** meter, where it alternates with lines of iambic trimeter). The poem's meter is relatively smooth. Indeed, long passages of the poem are perfectly metrically regular, as in the poem's first four lines

Had **we** | but **world** | **enough** | and **time**,
This **coy**-| **ness**, **lad**-| **y**, **were** | no **crime**.
We **would** | sit **down**, | and **think** | which **way**
To **walk**, | and **pass** | our **long** | love's **day**.

The lines are almost monotonous in their regularity—a monotony that the speaker eventually needs to break. Metrical variation is inevitable—even necessary—in a poem as long as "To His Coy Mistress." Marvell's metrical variations tend to be inobtrusive and, for

the purposes of interpreting the poem, not particularly significant. For example, Marvell is found of using a trochee instead of an iamb in the first foot of his lines, as in line 5:

Thou by the | **Indian** | **Ganges'** | **side**

The line opens with two **dactyls** rather than the expected iambs and follows these feet with a **trochee**, plus the extra syllable "side" at the end of the line. However, the reader hardly notices this irregularity. The variations keep the rhythm of the poem lively but they do not significantly affect the reader's experience of it.

Arguably, there is a more significant and pervasive metrical variation at work in the whole poem. With its rhymed iambic tetrameter **couplets**, "To His Coy Mistress" closely approximates a prestigious and widely used verse form in the Renaissance: heroic couplets. However, "To His Coy Mistress" is consistently one foot short of being proper heroic couplets: its tetrameter lines are eight syllables long, where a Renaissance reader—well-versed in heroic couplets—would expect ten. The poem consistently feels like it's falling short, failing to achieve the placid, dignified smoothness a reader expects in heroic couplets. This is a kind of *mea culpa* on Marvell's part: he admits that his poem is not quite as serious as a poem on a heroic subject should be. But it's also an advantage: what the poem loses in dignity and seriousness it makes up for in lightness and playfulness.

Rhyme Scheme

"To His Coy Mistress" is organized into rhyming **couplets**. Each couplet has its own rhyme; after Marvell completes one rhyme, he moves on to the next. One can see this pattern in the first 10 lines of the poem, which are rhymed *aabbccdde*. The couplets are designed to feel separate—and not just in terms of their rhyme. Many of the couplets in the first ten lines are conceptually distinct from each other. For example, the first two lines of the poem are a complete sentence, a complete thought:

Had we but world enough and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.

Notice that the speaker's thought begins at the start of the first line and ends at the end of the second line. In the third and fourth lines, he embarks on a new thought. The unit of rhyme thus serves to divide the poem both formally and conceptually.

The poem also contains a number of rhymes that look like **slant** or half rhymes: for example, "try" and "virginity" in lines 27-28. However, English pronunciation has shifted since Marvell's time. Though they may sound off to contemporary readers, for Marvell these were strong, full rhymes.

Figure of Speech

Following are the figures of speech in the poem “To his Coy Mistress”:

Metaphor

The implicit implied and hidden comparison between two objects is called a metaphor. A metaphor used in this poem is:

1. My *vegetable love* should grow

Vaster than empires and more slow

Here the speaker compares his love with vegetables on the basis of the shared quality of slow and gradual growth. It implies that just like the growth of vegetables which is not detectable when it is happening, the love of the speaker will increase slowly with time.

Simile

A simile is the explicit open comparison between two things or objects. It compares the two object with the help of words “like” and “as” The similes used in this poem are:

1. Now, therefore, while the *youthful hue*

Sits on thy skin *like morning dew*.

2. Now let us sport us while we may

And now, *like amorous bird of prey*.

Hyperbole

When a writer or poet exaggerates his/her feelings or any other scene in his work, it is called hyperbole. Following are the examples of hyperbole in this poem:

1. “vaster than empires”

The speaker claims that his love will grow vaster than any of the great empires. This is an exaggeration to emphasize the worth of his love.

2. An hundred years should go to praise Thine eyes

The speaker claims that he will praise his beloved’s eyes for one hundred years. This exaggeration serves the function of propagating the illustrious claims made by the speaker about his love.

3. An age at least to every part

The speaker says that he will take an age to praise every part of his body. Here, the speaker clearly exaggerates his fondness of the beloved’s body as it is not humanly possible.

Personification

Personification is the attribution of human qualities to nonhuman things. The personifications used in this poem are as follows:

1. *Time’s winged chariot* hurrying near.

Time is personified as sitting in a winged chariot and closing in on them.

2. Youthful hue/ Sits on thy skin like morning dew.

Here, “youthful hue” is personified.

Allusions

1. “The flood” is a biblical allusion and refers to Noah’s flood.

2. “Conversion of Jews” is another biblical allusion. Christians believe that all the Jews will convert to Christianity near the doomsday. So, this allusion refers to the doomsday.

Setting

The setting of "To His Coy Mistress" is, broadly speaking, the earth. Indeed, in the first stanza, the speaker imagines himself and his mistress wandering across the whole earth, from East Yorkshire (where the poet was born) in England to the Ganges River in India. Despite these geographical references, the poem doesn't say much about the cultural or

political context in which it was written. Mostly likely composed during the 1650s—though it was not published until the 1680s, after Marvell's death—"To His Coy Mistress" was written during a tumultuous period in English history. The English Civil War had concluded recently, with King Charles I being executed by a revolutionary group, and the English state was under the control of a party known as the Parliamentarians because they supported Parliament over the King. Marvell was an active, if sometimes reluctant, participant in these momentous political events; indeed, he sat in Parliament for much of the 1650s.

"To His Coy Mistress," however, does not acknowledge this political turmoil. Though the speaker makes reference to "empires" and "power," the "empires" and "power" he invokes are highly general; they are not tied to any political event or party, or even any nation. The poem may thus be said to retreat from the political complications of its time. It imagines sexuality—and love itself—as though they are free from politics and nationhood, or perhaps even a refuge from those burdens. The distance that the poem puts between itself and its historical context serves in large part to make its message universal; it seems that the speaker and his mistress could be any lovers living in any setting.