

To his coy mistress  
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In modern society there are different views on what love means: romantic, platonic, passionate and possessive love. The dictionary definition of love reads “ to have great attachment to and affection for” and “ to have passionate desire, longing feelings for” although every individual has a different notion of what love means, just as each of the poems chosen has a different meaning and it’s own idea: sexual, passionate, possessive and romantic. From the time of 1600-1900 love, these times also had different meanings.

I ave chosen the following poems: “ To His Coy Mistress”, by Andrew Marvell, “ First Love”, by John Clare and “ Porphyria’s Lover”, by Robert Browning. In the first poem, “ First Love”, John Clare has no control over his feelings, actions or emotions for his lover. He describes her as “ her face bloomed like a sweet flower” which he also uses as a simile as he is comparing her face to a flower and “ she stole his heart”. His reaction towards her shows us he is love struck as “ blood rushed to his face” and “ took his sight away”.

Many people would describe love struck as ‘ butterflies in the stomach’, ‘ legs turn to jelly’ and you become ‘ faint’. The poem is very physical, dramatic and romantic and has exaggerated his feelings because “ his legs refused to walk” and “ his life turned to clay”. He compares his feelings to his life, as though his life has never had this effect on him as she has and his emotions are in turmoil. The atmosphere is quite passionate even though his love for her is unrequited and he cannot move on from her. The way she doesn’t respond to him makes the reader sympathise with Clare and anyone who has ever been in this position.

If not, they might think that they would not want their love to be unrequited. Eleanor Green On the other hand, “ To His Coy Mistress” has a sexual undertone, especially when Andrew Marvell refers to his “ vegetable love” which “ shall grow”. This is an example of double entendre and is not clear whether he is talking about his sexual or emotional love for his mistress. He also uses imagery to describe his feelings: “ times winged chariot hurrying near” tells us how time, like chariots, travels fast and that we should make the most of time.

He is open and persuasive about his feelings for her as he explains “ two hundred to adore each breast”. This, nowadays, would be considered as a ‘ chat-up’ line. Marvell also uses hyperbole and exaggeration for the biblical reference of “ I would love you ten years before the flood...

till the conversion of the Jews” as though what he’s asking for is not a sin and metaphors when he comments on “ deserts of vast eternity”. He says that if he had all the time in the world he would spend thousands of years complimenting her, but of course he cannot. His love would be described as passionate, physical and sexual in the way he tries to seduce her and praises parts of her body. Marvell also uses satire as the poem in that time, would have been used after a meal for gentlemen’s entertainment after a meal, where he jokes about “ worms shall try that long preserved virginity and your quaint honour turn to dust” as though when she is dead the worms shall see your body and her beauty will be gone. Porphyria’s Lover” suggests coldness especially in the beginning where it starts off with the “ rain set early in to-night”.

This contrasts with "First Love" s "I was ne'er so struck before that hour with love so sudden and so sweet". However, Porphyria "glides" in suddenly and this makes the atmosphere warm as she "shut the cold out and the storm". The stormy lake, "to vex the lake", contrasts to her entrance. Her presence warms up the house and she makes it seem quite sensuous when she reveals her skin, "her smooth white shoulder bare".

Eleanor Green Browning uses rhyming couplets at the end of his sentences, "awake: lake", "shawl: fall" and "rain: vain" and the verses are usually the same length to give it a tense atmosphere. He does not describe his feelings as much as Clare does but describes the actions and his surroundings, "and all the cottage warm" and "three time her little throat around/And strangled her". He interprets her behaviour by ignoring her, "and called me/When no voice replied", even though she is trying to seduce him by using body language, "she put her arm around my waist". I think she is tempting him as she thinks he thinks she is having an affair and is trying to prove she is not betraying him. If she has, maybe she regrets it? During the time he strangled her he convinces himself "no pain felt she; I am quite sure she felt no pain" as she was his at that precise moment which shows he is a controlling and possessive lover, "Porphyria worshipped me". He does not try to seduce her much and he is not very romantic; she is the seducer.

At the end of the poem, he shows no love or affection, only the conscience of God, "yet God has not said a word". As you read the poems they become less romantic and more dramatic and aggressive. "First Love" was very romantic. John Clare could not have his heart back; it was unrequited love whereas "To His Coy Mistress" was quite sexual and physical. Andrew

Marvell was very persuasive and convincing in his attempts to seduce her and fails. " Porphyria's Lover" illustrates possessiveness and jealousy.

Robert Browning took his ' passionate desire' too far and killed his lover as his jealousy took over him. They all treat women very differently, in ways that women in today's world would find praising women's body parts and ignoring women might be unacceptable. The lead women in the poems show themselves to be seductive, disdainful and reserved. Eleanor Green The role of the male in each situation is very different.

Robert Browning wanted to own his lover, or ' control' her, and rather than risk losing his love, he kills her. John Clare deeply regretted such a setback of his emotions and looked on helplessly. Andrew Marvell, rather than seduce his mistress gradually, expects an instant reaction to his lust.