

Crucial ideas in to his coy mistress

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In “To His Coy Mistress,” poet Andrew Marvell gushes about his mistress’ beauty and describes everything they would do together if they had an eternity to live. However, due to her shyness, he finds it difficult to pursue her and thus reminds her of her limited time of beauty, suggesting that she should be bolder in loving him. Through the usage of several literary elements, Marvell attempts to present the reality of death and to convince his mistress to not be as shy and to allow their relationship to progress.

Marvell opens the poem by presenting his mistress as an unreachable goddess, describing his undying love for her and her shy nature that blocked any development in their relationship. “Had we but world enough, and time,” he started out. “This coyness, lady, were no crime.” Marvell continues on to talk about everything they would do if they had the time, from “[passing] our long love’s day / [...] by the Indian Ganges” to “[complaining] [...] by the side / Of Humber” half a world away. He compares the metaphor of his “vegetable love” to massive empires, growing for her grandly even without her affection. Dedicating hundreds and thousands of years to worship each of her individual aspects, he further emphasizes his love for his stunning and godlike mistress.

However, the second verse of the poem takes a sharp turn from its original path and faces reality head-on. In his metaphor of “Time’s wingèd chariot,” which is “hurrying near,” Marvell reminds her that her “beauty shall no more be found” over time. Using the paradox of the “Deserts of vast eternity” to describe the barren life after death, he implies that all that her “long-preserved virginity, / And [...] quaint honor [will] turn to dust,”

suggesting that her coyness and unwillingness for progress would eventually lead her youth and beauty to waste.

For the third and last verse, Marvell steers the poem in yet another direction and proposes to his mistress to take their relationship farther while they can. Because death is looming near, he reasons, they should make the best of the time they have “ while the youthful hue / Sits on [her] skin like morning dew.” The diction and tone in this particular verse suggests a sense of lightheartedness and lack of worries, with Marvell wanting to “ tear [their] pleasures with rough strife / Through the iron gates of life.” Acknowledging that it is impossible to “ make our sun / Stand still” or to achieve eternal life, he aims to “ make him run” by loving each other and going on multiple adventures in the short time they have together.

Marvell uses literary elements such as metaphors, tone, and diction in his poem “ To His Coy Mistress” to convey senses of his mistress’ beauty, the ugly truth of death, and the carefree nature he proposes. Through this, he wishes to frankly present the unpleasant end of life and beauty in order to persuade her to rid herself of her coyness and to fly into the sunset “ like amorous birds of prey.”