

A woman to her lover
by christina walsh
and to his coy
mistress by andrew
marvel



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In this essay I am going to compare the two poems ' A Woman to Her Lover' by Christina Walsh, written in the middle of the nineteenth century and ' To His Coy Mistress' by Andrew Marvell, from the seventeenth century. Each of the two poems show a different gender perspective and the different views on marriage in the society at the time they were written. Christina Walsh's poem reflects the inferior view of women in the Victorian era. However in the seventeenth century when ' To His Coy Mistress' was written there was an unwritten rule of courtly love where the woman had the choice of who she marries and to achieve a woman's love a man would have to almost worship her.

The titles of both poems start the idea of opposite gender perspectives; feminism and chauvinism. In ' A Woman to Her Lover' the word ' her' suggests a feminist voice speaking for all women. This is reinforced by the use of indefinite article ' A Woman' suggesting Christina Walsh is speaking for a universal group. However in ' To His Coy Mistress', ' his' suggests possession and ownership of the woman. Christina Walsh addresses the morale values of love.

She is protesting against the inequality in marriage and the inferior role of women in society ' no servant will I be' she is saying how she disagrees with women being expected to full fill domestic roles. The poem is proposing the previously unthought-of of idea of ' co-equal love'. In contrast Marvel's poem portraying his desire for a sexual relationship ' now let us sport us while we may'. The poem is an argument persuading his ' mistress' to overcome her ' coyness'. Where as Walsh deals with the concept of romantic love ' to love and die with you', Marvel deals with physical kind of love, he reveals the

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primitive and basic human instinct with quite raw images 'adore each breast' and 'tear our pleasures'. The tone in 'A Woman to Her Lover' is direct and challenging 'O lover I refuse you! '.

Use of 'O' reflects a demand for attention and the exclamation mark shows power and anger. She also uses the word 'fool' which is mocking of men. This reinforces the angry tone and also introduces a frustration. The alliteration 'wakened woman' makes the poem seem precise and articulate. 'To His Coy Mistress' has an equally powerful tone only it is more crude.

Marvel uses the hyperbole 'Vaster than empires, and more slow' this implies an uncontrollable mood this also shows Marvels passion for women. The tone in 'A Woman to Her Lover' changes in the last stanza. This projects equality, there is a calm tone created by the soft alliteration 'hand holding hand' this makes a harmonious end to the poem. Later in the poem marvel creates an intense and heated atmosphere 'instant fires' this phrase makes a sense of spontaneity and the word 'fire' could be a release of anger and heat. The atmosphere in 'To His Coy Mistress' is added to by vulgar imagery 'then worms shall try that long preserved virginity'. The sexual connotation 'worms' creates an explicit atmosphere.

The tone of 'A Woman to Her Lover' is reflected in the structure of the poem. Four unequal stanzas. This irregularity could represent the daringness of the issues she is raising. The repetition of the phrase 'O lover I refuse you!' emphasises her anger and refusal.

But it changes at the end to 'O husband I am yours forever' the contrast of the phrases highlights the other side of the message. In 'To His Coy
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Mistress' the first stanza is long which reflects long time scales, this connects to the imagery used ' an age at least' this also reinforces Marvels impatience. The second stanza is shorter this shows Marvels urgency, this also corresponds to the imagery, ' before your quaint honour turn to dust', and the lack of time Marvel is trying to portray. Walsh uses the power of three for example ' every deed and word and wish' this suggests a steadiness and shows that the poem is a predisposed argument as she must have thought carefully about persuasive techniques.

This gives it an assured and on another level displays the political and social nature as apposed to a personal voice. There is no rhyme in ' A Woman to her Lover', this could suggest a protest against the norm which is reflected in that her message is challenging society. She repeatedly uses power of three, ' shame, pity and abasement' suggesting a release and flow of her argument. Enjambment through the stanza's back this up. In contrast to this ' To His Coy Mistress' has rhyming couplets, ' praise' and ' gaze' or ' transpires' and ' fires', showing Marvels desire to be in sexual harmony. There is also half rhyme within a line ' Rough strife' this could reflect violence in his passion.

The regularity of the rhyme suggests confidence in charming of women. There is a steady rhythm in ' To His Coy Mistress' this creates a flow to Marvels argument. The poem is written in a steady rhythm (iambic pentameter) ' Love you ten years before the flood' this echoes a beat which could suggest the ticking of a clock which implies an urgency. The language in ' a woman to her lover' is complex ' Vanquished' and ' Abasement' this suggests a rise above inferiority.

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Walsh uses imperatives 'GO!' this suggests sincerity. However the language in 'To His Coy Mistress' is simple 'walk' and 'grow' this shows the simplicity of Marvel's sexual desire and basic human instinct. Walsh's language is also emotive 'to love and die' this reflects suffering it is also negative. In the last stanza the language becomes more positive and cliché 'music', 'joy' and heart 'heart' this supports the tone and message of equality. At the beginning of 'To his coy mistress' the language is romantic 'pass our long loves day' this is gentle alliteration this is an attempt to woo her but it could also be seen as patronising.

Walsh also uses sensory language 'laugh with joy' this emphasises her change in tone at the end of the poem as it shows happiness and enjoyment. Similarly the language in 'To His Coy Mistress' becomes more sensual, Marvel uses more rich language such as 'language' or 'devour' this could be another attempt to gain his mistresses sexual love. Marvel also uses sibilance threaded throughout the poem, for example 'coyness', 'rubies' or 'Jews' this adds a softness and compassionateness. Walsh strengthens her message with quite powerful imagery, for example the spiritual reference 'a wingless angel', 'angel' reflects the pressure she feels to be a perfect wife but on the other hand the word 'wingless' shows that she feels trapped and she is restricted from escaping the society which is so normal. This imagery is echoed by 'a doll to dress and sit', the word 'doll' suggests men's possession over women, 'to dress and sit' suggests a lack of independence and manipulation by men.

Again this strengthens her message by giving us an example of what she thinks is wrong with society. Marvel's imagery is contrived, 'By the Indian
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Ganges' side', this typical romantic image adds to the strength of the argument. He also uses biblical references such as 'love you ten years before the flood' and 'till the conversion of the Jews' these hyperbolic sentences also add to the persuasion of the poem. Walsh uses the simile and (paradox) 'as conqueror to the vanquished' this affects oppression and creates sympathy.

She also suggests a change in society with the image 'wakened woman of our time' this suggests that women are waking to suffrage and realisation of the modern concept of feminism. Walsh presents imagery on a big scale for example 'stars' and 'spheres' these reflects the enormity of the concept she addresses and the newness of her idea of this different social path.

Marvels use of the double entendre 'My vegetable love should grow'. On face value this communicates his growing love although the phallic quality of the metaphor suggests Marvels desperation and urgency of lust.

Throughout the poem Marvel uses time imagery which is added to by the structure of the poem. For example the personification, 'Times winged chariot hurrying near', this gives power to the argument and reinforces Marvels urgency, The word 'winged' gives pace and speed. Marvel uses the sexual connotation 'thy beauty shall no more be found; Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound'. marble vault' suggests a sacred quality to 'his mistress' beauty, but the word 'marble' implies a coldness to shyness.

Marvel also gives us the idea of violent passion 'like amorous birds of prey' this suggests a predator like quality to Marvels lust. This is reinforced by the vital two lines 'Let us roll all our strength, and all our sweetness, up into one

ball'. On one hand this line coming together in passion and love, the enjambment gives flow and pace reflecting rolling movement, which could also have sexual meaning. On the other hand this line brings the poem together and gives it a climax. Overall I think 'To His Coy Mistress' presents a stronger message. He uses sharp imagery, successful argument structure and witty language.

His techniques are engaging on a more personal level. Whereas Walsh's argument presents a more moral and meaningful argument, the purity with which it is written almost takes away from the strength of her message.