

And some honesty, phrased beautifully

By Holly Lisle

This poem could be subtitled “What I appreciate about men.” It’s “To his coy mistress” by Andrew Marvell, and it is one of my favorite poems in the world. Read it, and when you’re finished, I’ll tell you why.

Andrew Marvell (1621 – 1678)

To His Coy Mistress

*HAD we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, Lady, were no crime
We would sit down and think which way
To walk and pass our long love’s day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges’ side
Shouldst rubies find: I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love 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,
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,
Nor would I love at lower rate.
But at my back I always hear
Time’s wingèd chariot hurrying near;*

*And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found,
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song: then worms shall try
That long preserved virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust:
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,
And while thy willing soul transpires
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 power.
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough the iron gates of life:
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.*

It's a hell of a poem, most of all because it's honest. It says, "Babe, you're beautiful, you're hot, and if we had forever, I'd take forever to worship at your pedestal. But we don't. The clock is ticking, and you and I are going to be dust before either of us can blink twice, and that fine virgin honor of yours is going to go to waste. So while you're still hot and I'm still horny, let's get down like a couple of wild things; we can't make time stand still, but we can make the bastard run."

It gets to the point, it has a point that matters, and in damn near 400 years, it hasn't lost an ounce of either its passion

or it's poignancy. He's dust and so is she, and I hope to hell he convinced her before it was too late, and that they had a hell of a lot of fun.

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