**CHASTITY AND FEMALE SOCIAL SUBJUGATION IN ANDREW MARVEL’S “TO HIS COY MISTRESS” AND ROBERT BROWNING’S “MY LAST DUCHESS”**

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**ABSTRACT**

Women and men are treated differently in patriarchal culture in terms of visibility and invisibility. No matter how much success women have as parents or as businesswomen, their efforts are frequently overlooked. This study doth examine the notion of chastity and the subjugation of women in Andrew Marvel's "To His Coy Mistress" and Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess". Verily, it doth analyse the Literary Devices and the Poetic Devices used in the poems. The portrayal of fair maidens in the poems is characterised by their merry and frolicsome nature. Verily, these dramatic monologues doth portray narrators who art dominating and egotistical, disregarding a woman's wishes as insignificant. The objectification of the fair maiden's form is an additional aspect that doth reveal itself in both of the poetic verses. Indeed, both of the narrators doth hold the belief that the beauty of women is confined to the surface level of their fair skin. Their observation, which can be characterised as voyeuristic, doth serve to reveal their particular understanding of the concept of feminine beauty and allure. Both narrators doth overtly exhibit the woman's fair physique for the purpose of voyeuristic observation through their choice of language and expressions within the poem.

**CHAPTER ONE**

**INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 Background of the study**

This project aims to evaluate the themes of chastity and female social subjugation in Andrew Marvel’s “To His Coy Mistress” and Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess”. This exploration will be approached from the perspective of the patriarchy system. This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the selected text, offering valuable insights to users of this project and enhancing their understanding.

The patriarchy system is characterised by a culture that deeply devalues women and glorifies masculinity, although the subjugation of women is not the primary focus of patriarchy. Andrew Marvel’s “To His Coy Mistress” and Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess” portray women as being devalued and untrustworthy, especially when making accusations of sexual misconduct against men. Women's choices and natures are used to justify aggression and deceit against them (Akaeny, 2024). Women fulfil various significant roles within patriarchal culture, which can differ based on factors such as race, class, and other forms of diversity. One aspect that stands out is how women and femininity are used to define men and masculinity (Chinaecherem, 2024). Men possess qualities that are often associated with masculinity: independence, strength, assertiveness, and rationality. "Real women" (specifically, middle or upper-middle-class white women) are often described as dependent, vulnerable, pliant, weak, supportive, nurturing, intuitive, emotional, and empathic (Edwards & Kalan, 2024).

In patriarchal culture, there is a fundamental distinction between "real women" and "real men." Some individuals view women as objects that represent a man's achievements and are used to impress and compete with other men. Many men do not hold positions of power in the patriarchal hierarchy. Women are often seen as secondary, providing a sense of control and power to men who may not have much of it (Sharma & Chauhan, 2023). Women are expected to take care of men who have been harmed by other men in a patriarchal society. When men fail, as they inevitably do, women often find themselves shouldering the blame and bearing the brunt of men's disappointment, pain, and rage. Women boost male egos by mirroring them at an amplified level. It is evident that the text is skillfully crafted. Women often reinforce men's sense of masculinity by deferring to them, letting them take the lead in conversations, and boosting their egos in various ways. Men often perceive themselves in the eyes of women as independent, autonomous, strong, and successful. It is often observed that heterosexual men tend to prioritise their own needs and perspectives in relationships with women (Al-Ameedi & Al-Tamimi, 2022). However, it is ultimately other men - "coaches, friends, teammates, co-workers, sports figures, fathers, or mentors" - on whom men rely for confirmation of their manhood.

According to Sharma (2023), there is a concerning dynamic where men bond with each other by engaging in behaviours that demean and devalue women. These actions can range from extreme measures like gang rape to more subtle behaviours like making sexist jokes or objectifying women's bodies by rating them as "babes". Participation in college fraternities, football teams, and other male groups that degrade women is seen as a form of socialisation for masculinity within a patriarchal society (Obika & Ezenwamadu & Judith, 2020). Men who do not actively participate in such rituals are also part of the problem: it is uncommon to find a man who consistently objects to such camaraderie. Regardless of their level of participation, men in these all-male groups often feel compelled to adopt derogatory attitudes towards women in order to solidify their place within the masculine brotherhood.

Women often serve as a bridge to the realm of emotions, particularly for men. These links play a crucial role in addressing the impact of patriarchy on men, encouraging them to confront their emotions and embrace their vulnerabilities. According to Tripathi & Sharma (2023), men sometimes seek companionship with women to alleviate feelings of emptiness, meaninglessness, and disconnection. Nevertheless, the societal expectation that men should be self-reliant and independent creates a conflicting desire and frustration towards women. Some men may feel a sense of envy or resentment towards women's emotional intelligence. When women are unable to provide the emotional connection men desire (yet resist), men often place blame on women for not being "loving or sexual enough, of being manipulative, withholding, selfish individuals who they feel deserve consequences. Men are often seen as active participants in the realm of sexuality, while women are frequently objectified. According to Subramanyam (2023), women's sexuality is often seen as a means to satisfy men. Whether a woman wants to engage in sexual activity is often unrelated to whether she actually does. The concept of patriarchal heterosexuality highlights how it perpetuates and reinforces patriarchal principles. It prioritises men's needs and experiences, while defining sexual encounters based on male pleasure and orgasm.

**1.2 Statement of the problem**

In patriarchal culture, women and men are subject to varying degrees of visibility and invisibility. Women often go unnoticed for their accomplishments, whether it's successfully raising children or contributing brilliant ideas in a business setting. It is interesting to note that when men exhibit socially undesirable behaviour, they seem to fade into the background, leaving us to ponder the implications of male privilege (Garganigo, 2021). Visibility and race or class can also be important factors to consider. African-American individuals who have committed violent crimes often face the unfortunate stereotype of being seen primarily as violent individuals, rather than simply being seen as individuals who have committed acts of violence.

Within a patriarchal culture, conflicts of interest between women and men are often dismissed, despite the clear inequalities in the distribution of responsibilities and limited resources (Bhabaha, 1995). As an illustration, Arlie Hochschild has extensively researched the phenomenon of working parents disregarding inequality within their marriages. Surprisingly, even though the women in the families she examined worked the equivalent of an additional month each year, they still denied the existence of such disparities. Given the close bonds between women and men in various familial roles, we often hesitate to acknowledge any potential conflicts of interest. This passage highlights the way in which conflicts of interest can be conveniently dismissed by using patriarchal justifications for inequalities and injustices. It suggests that women's choices and supposed defects are used to excuse violence and maintain the status quo. The author argues that as long as women receive what they supposedly choose or deserve, there is no need to address conflicts of interest or question the predominantly male decision-makers who control the resources. Men continue to harbour a deep-seated fear of women due to the potential for rebellion and retaliation. This fear, coupled with guilt, gives rise to misogyny, which can be viewed as a cultural manifestation of men's capacity to feel remorse for the oppression of women. However, men also have a deep emotional connection and dependency on women, which can sometimes lead to a complex and potentially risky dynamic: "When fear and envy intertwine with love and need, a volatile concoction emerges that distorts our perception of ourselves and others to an unrecognisable extent.

**1.3 Aims and objectives**

The primary objective of this study is to examine the notion of chastity and the subjugation of women in Andrew Marvel's "To His Coy Mistress" and Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess".

**1.4 Scope and limitations of the study**

This work has a broad scope. The determination will be based on the efficacy and relevance of a certain component to the investigation. The study will focus on the major body of text, namely the portion that is relevant to the issue. It would have been advantageous to utilise a larger number of texts for this research, but it will be restricted to Andrew Marvel's "To His Coy Mistress" and Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess".

**CHAPTER TWO**

**LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

**The concept of Patriarchy**

The concept of patriarchy revolves around the idea that it is a social structure rather than a deliberate conspiracy orchestrated by men. Oppression against women is not always a deliberate act; men may not always have the intention to oppress. Even men face the immense pressures of a social system that promotes patriarchal norms, like engaging in locker room conversations about women (Emery, 1982). Patriarchy harms both men and women. As an illustration, it is worth noting that men who adhere to traditional masculine norms often experience emotional repression and a reluctance to seek connection and intimacy. This behaviour is driven by a desire to avoid being labelled as weak and to maintain a sense of control and protection from other men (Katrak, 2006).

The treatment of men and women can differ based on their gender, which our courts define as sex discrimination. However, it is important to note that men as a group are not oppressed in a patriarchal culture (Mardorossian, 1999). It is true that certain groups of men can experience oppression. As an illustration, men who identify as feminine or gay often face ongoing oppression, along with African-American, Latino, and Asian-American men. The preceding paragraph highlights the negative impact of patriarchy on individual men. However, patriarchy does not oppress men solely based on their gender (O’Connor, 1986).

What about men who are drafted and obligated to serve in combat? Such policies can unfairly target individuals based on their gender. However, as Allan Johnson has pointed out, "a group cannot oppress itself" unless the definition of oppression is diluted to the point where it is synonymous with being harmed (Salunke, 2014). It is possible for a group to cause harm to itself, and its members may experience negative consequences due to their social standing. According to Melrose (2006), the dominant group in a culture cannot experience oppression if we define oppression as group-based social inequalities. According to MacMahon (1996), "oppression is a relationship that exists between groups, rather than between groups and society as a whole." Even during times of conflict, individuals do not experience oppression solely based on their gender.

War has a detrimental impact on individual men, as well as on racial and ethnic minorities and the less fortunate. These marginalised groups are often exploited and forced into dangerous situations, while those in privileged positions benefit from the conflicts (Ailes, 2020). War does not have the power to oppress men as a group, as it does not diminish or undermine patriarchal masculinity. On the contrary, war tends to exalt and reinforce patriarchal masculinity, enabling men as a collective to assert dominance over others. In a patriarchal society, it is often observed that men do not necessarily feel privileged, despite not experiencing oppression based on their gender. One factor to consider is the growing institutionalisation of patriarchal power. The exercise of power in pre-capitalist patriarchies was often concentrated in the hands of individual patriarchs. However, in our current late capitalist patriarchy, men collectively hold power over women, while also being subject to the growing influence of institutional patriarchal forces (Semenov, 2024). Many individuals, regardless of their gender or race, often find themselves positioned lower in the hierarchical structure, especially within the workplace. Numerous individuals face significant oppression due to their race or social class. The ways in which men may feel diminished in power can be attributed to the pressures of conforming to societal expectations of masculinity. These expectations include measuring self-worth based on achievements, suppressing doubts and vulnerabilities, and stifling emotions (Farajallah et al., 2015).

However, the fact that many men do not feel privileged does not necessarily negate the existence of male privilege. People who have privilege often fail to recognise it, while those who lack privilege are more likely to be aware of it. Privilege is not something bestowed upon someone as a divine proclamation, declaring "this is my Son, my Beloved, on whom my favour rests; listen to Him". According to Allan Johnson, privilege can manifest in various ways, such as being listened to and respected when we speak, receiving prompt and courteous service in establishments, and having the freedom to express opinions and move around. Equality is undermined when common courtesy is unequally distributed, giving certain groups an unfair advantage over others.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

**Feminist Theories Consistent With Patriarchy**

The theories of sex equality that gained the most acceptance by the end of the twentieth century were liberal feminism's emphasis on formal equality and Catharine A. MacKinnon's approach to sex inequality or dominance. The concept of formal equality put forth by liberal feminism is widely recognised in cultural understandings of equality and court analyses. On the other hand, MacKinnon's approach to inequality has become the dominant topic of discussion regarding sex equality in the legal academy. Both theories, unfortunately, lack substance; neither incorporates values that challenge patriarchy.

**The theory of Liberal Feminism**

The perspective of liberal feminism is based on the belief that individuals have the ability to make independent choices that align with their own interests and personal preferences.'Human well-being should increase as individuals have more choices.' Sexism functions by exerting pressure or enforcing, sometimes through legal means, societal expectations for individuals to conform to traditional gender roles, regardless of their personal preferences.

Equality between women and men can be achieved by ensuring that individuals have equal opportunities and choices, regardless of their gender. This solution is expressed through the legal standard of formal equality. It is essential that individuals be treated equally, regardless of their sex or gender, if they are in similar situations. The concept of formal equality is based on the approach pioneered by the NAACP in the early cases of racial discrimination, ultimately leading to the landmark decision of Brown v Board of Education. The NAACP contended that the state's imposition of segregation was a form of racial discrimination, as it treated individuals of different races unequally. This argument was based on the violation of the Equal Protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The feminist movement started advocating for change in the legal system just as racial equality had already made Jim Crow segregation in the South unconstitutional.

The dominance of liberal feminists in the contemporary women's movement, particularly in relation to law, is evident despite the potential arguments, including those from feminists, that may support certain traditional sex-specific rules.

This argument made by feminists highlights the issue of formal equality and how statutes can inadvertently discriminate based on sex by treating individuals differently solely because of their gender (Ailes, 2020).

The Supreme Court has embraced this approach in its constitutional sex discrimination cases, which has also become the prevailing notion of equality in the general culture (Hussain & Hashmi, 2023). This standard is attractive because it is easily manageable in a legal context and aligns with the strong liberal and individualistic traditions prevalent in American culture. It can be quite appealing when a liberal argument is available, such as when a woman is denied an employment opportunity that a similarly situated man has access to.

**The theory of Dominance Feminism**

Since 1979, when Catharine MacKinnon published her first book, there have been numerous criticisms directed towards formal equality. Understanding the problems with formal equality is crucial in grasping MacKinnon's alternative, the inequality or dominance approach. According to MacKinnon, the liberal approach provides protection to women only in situations where women and men are in similar positions. If there is a relevant difference between women and men that affects their situation, the standard becomes inapplicable. This statement highlights the allowance for distinctions based on perceived relevance within the framework of formal equality. However, the greater the disparity between women and men, the more pronounced their differences become, making these differences more significant. MacKinnon argues that in societies with high levels of sexual inequality, the effectiveness of the liberal equality standard is diminished.

MacKinnon emphasises that formal equality, while appearing gender-neutral, actually prioritises male needs and standards. It only applies to women when they conform to male norms and circumstances. In addition, formal equality only grants women who resemble men access to the rules and practices that have been established by and for men."" Specifically, formal equality allows women workers to compete with male colleagues based on the rules and requirements established by men with wives.

Women solicitors working in a firm that requires 2400 billable hours a year should be treated equally, regardless of the differences in their domestic responsibilities compared to their male colleagues. Discrimination has never revolved around the differential treatment of women and men in similar situations, although it has certainly posed challenges for women who don't fit the norm. According to MacKinnon, discrimination stems from the way differences between women and men are systematically turned into advantages for men and disadvantages for women. This results in a disproportionate number of men at the top of each class and race.86 The issue of discrimination based on sex arises when women and men are not in similar situations, despite the expectation of formal equality. This is when the search for discrimination should not be overlooked.

MacKinnon argues that the eroticization of women's subordinate status is a significant factor contributing to women's inequality, serving as a key element of male dominance. Her theory delves into the dynamics of power between men and women, particularly how it manifests through the shaping of a sexual narrative that perpetuates the subordination of women. The way patriarchy makes women's subordination appealing to both women and men creates a significant consequence for women, as they become complicit in their own subordination. According to MacKinnon, there is a possibility that experiencing pleasure during sex could be linked to enjoying one's subordination, which is not an uncommon occurrence.

According to MacKinnon, male domination of women is achieved through sexuality. Sexual dominance is often associated with males. It is evident that hierarchy is often sexualized, particularly by men, if not exclusively by them. Gender plays a significant role in this phenomenon. The male sexual role revolves around forcefully asserting dominance over individuals with less power. Acts of dominance can be experienced as sexually arousing, similar to the act of sex itself. They are indeed.

This theory of sexuality highlights the feminist perspective by examining how it is shaped by male power dynamics. It emphasises that sexuality is often defined by men, imposed on women, and plays a significant role in shaping gender identity. This approach places feminism at the core of understanding the power dynamics between men and women, emphasising the significance of sex and the dynamics of dominance and submission in shaping these relationships.

MacKinnon highlights the prevalence of male sexual abuse towards women, including acts such as rape, battery, sexual harassment, abuse of children, prostitution, and pornography. She argues that the widespread acceptance of such abuse supports her claim that the objectification of women's inequality is a major contributor to sexual inequality, affecting both men and women.

MacKinnon's main focus is power, which we should be mindful of. It is important to consistently seek out the various ways in which gender differences are consistently used to give men more power and women less power. Sex is at the heart of this phenomenon: "sexuality emerges as the interactive dynamic of gender as an inequality." MacKinnon's approach has not gained widespread acceptance among courts, but it has made a significant impact in the legal academy. There is a clear connection between contemporary heterosexuality and subordination that women experience. MacKinnon makes a valid point that inequality is not caused by difference, but rather by how we interpret and respond to difference.

**Consistent With Patriarchy**

MacKinnon's analysis offers valuable insights into the ways social forces perpetuate gender inequality. However, it fails to address values that contradict patriarchal norms, leaving a void at its core. Curiously, the content is excessively centred around women and sexuality. The organisation of patriarchy does not revolve primarily around the interactions between women and men. At the heart of patriarchy lies a struggle among men, driven by their desire for power and dominance over one another. This is its core: patriarchy values power, control, autonomy, independence, toughness, invulnerability, strength, aggressiveness, rationality, detachment (being non-emotional), and other traditionally masculine attributes that have proven effective in the battle against other men (Siddiq, 2023).

It is evident that within our society, heterosexuality and pornography play a significant role in reinforcing the patriarchal system and further marginalising women. However, it is important to note that the driving force behind patriarchy is not solely based on men's control over women's sexual access. Men's fear of other men and their desire for power and control to prevent being dominated by others is a significant motivating factor (Alhamid, 2022).

MacKinnon fails to provide any alternative to patriarchal values. Her bottom line and key value, power, are deeply rooted in patriarchal values. Seeking more power for women, as it is currently defined, does not necessarily pose an immediate threat to patriarchy. Even if there are advancements in the next decade where women who align themselves with male norms gain more influence in patriarchal systems, it is doubtful that the overall situation for most women will significantly improve.

In an ideal world, a seamless transition into a society where women hold equal power to men would make MacKinnon's solution more viable. For instance, if women suddenly comprised 50 percent of the Senate, the House of Representatives, the Supreme Court, and the Cabinet, her proposal could be effective. It is possible that women in positions of power could potentially recognise and reward qualities that are not traditionally associated with masculinity. MacKinnon's approach, while well articulated, falls short in providing a comprehensive solution to dismantling patriarchy. By granting additional power solely to a select group of women who succeed within patriarchal systems, the fundamental structure of patriarchy remains unchallenged in the immediate future." Although legal thinking is heavily influenced by feminist theories, it fails to achieve true equality for everyday women who often bear the primary responsibility of caregiving and work in traditionally female-dominated occupations. This is because these theories do not effectively challenge the prevailing patriarchal values." A more promising approach would be one that embraces values that go against patriarchal norms, values that question the patriarchal fixation on autonomy, independence, control, and power over others. So far, cultural feminism is the only strand of feminist theory that has shown promise, although it has faced criticism in the legal academy and other law-related circles.

**The Impact of Patriarchy**

The influence of the patriarchy on society has been far-reaching, shaping different facets of our lives, such as politics, economics, and culture. These are some important areas where the impact of patriarchy is still evident:

Patriarchy perpetuates gender inequality, resulting in disparities in education, employment opportunities, and income. There is still a significant gender pay gap, with women earning less than men for equal work, and a lack of gender diversity in leadership positions (Williams, 2014).

The issue of gender-based violence is deeply rooted in the patriarchal system, which perpetuates male dominance and control over women. This perpetuates the continuation of problems such as domestic violence and sexual harassment (Edwards & Kalan, 2024).

Reproductive Rights: It is unfortunate that women's control over their reproductive choices, such as access to contraception and safe abortions, is often limited by patriarchal systems. Women's autonomy and bodily autonomy are restricted by this (Afsari & Omrani, 2015).

The media and popular culture have a strong influence on perpetuating gender stereotypes and objectifying women, which in turn reinforces patriarchal norms (Gyawali, 2023).

**Understanding patriarchy and oppression of women**

In his work, Atasoy (2020) provides a detailed explanation of patriarchy as a political system that perpetuates the belief in male dominance and superiority. This system asserts that men have the right to exert control and rule over those who are perceived as weak, particularly women. It further highlights the various methods, including psychological manipulation and aggression, through which this dominance is maintained.

According to Nichols (2017), in certain situations, women may find themselves in a position where marriage leads to them being seen as property within their husbands' lineages, resulting in the loss of personal rights and self-identities. It is evident that marriage and motherhood can reinforce men's already dominant position in various aspects of society, including kinship, interpersonal relationships, and the political and economic spheres. This power dynamic allows men to exert control over women and institutions within societies.The study focuses on the exploration of women fiction writers' portrayal of dominance and the depiction of women characters in their pursuit of freedom. For instance, Amouzou's analysis of Flora Nwapa's novel One is Enough highlights the remarkable qualities of the women characters - their strength, competence, courage, and success. They are fiercely independent, self-reliant, refusing to be subjugated or oppressed by anyone, and standing up against the marginalisation of their gender.

In Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions, the portrayal of Mr Sigauke reveals a deeply ingrained patriarchal mindset, where women are viewed as subordinate and expected to unquestioningly comply with the wishes of men like him. He consistently expects Nyasha to comply with his demands, and whenever she attempts to express her true self, he perceives it as a direct challenge to his authority (Saba, 2023). There are instances where a woman's decisions are made by the father due to the perception that she may not be capable of making the correct choices. Sharma & Chauhan (2023) explored various African countries and discovered an interesting belief held by men in Cameroon. They believe that tertiary institutions have a negative impact on women, making it challenging for them to find suitable partners for marriage. When the decision not to send girls to school was questioned, it sparked suspicion and aggression among men who feared a threat to their masculinity. This concept has had an impact on young girls, who sometimes choose to discontinue their education in order to marry and gain acceptance and respect in society (Rokanuzzaman, 2020). Furthermore, the analysis by Andima and Tjiramanga (2014) delves into the portrayal of a young girl in a patriarchal society who is forced into marriage at a young age in the short story "We Must Choose Life." The process of getting married is determined through negotiations between her father and other elders. Despite her personal desires, she is unable to refuse her father's decision due to the traditional belief that women and girls should not be involved in decision-making, even when it concerns their own lives. According to Ibrahim (2024), patriarchy grants power to men while leaving women without rights, rendering them powerless and vulnerable. They are often left out of decision-making processes and are expected to comply with the decisions made by men, in accordance with cultural norms.

In African cultures, marriage holds great significance. Although it is a union between two individuals, families often become involved in the process. Marriage varies across cultures, with different customs and traditions. Love or emotional attachment to a person is not always necessary, but it can develop over time (Shahin, 2022). As part of the marriage tradition, it is customary to pay lobola to the girl's family when seeking a wife. According to Edwards-Jauch (2016), the payment of lobola/bride wealth plays a significant role in exerting patriarchal control over women's sexuality. The practice of lobola perpetuates a harmful cycle where women are bound and restricted, as they are expected to pay double the amount of lobola initially given by the groom's family in order to secure a bride.

Some argue that lobola perpetuates the unequal treatment of women, as it can lead some men to view their wives as possessions due to the payment made. According to Ailes (2020), in certain cultures, it is the responsibility of men to engage in negotiations and establish the appropriate lobola payment. Some men view women as objects to be negotiated for and share their value, which reduces women to commodities (MacMahon, 1996; Melrose, 2006). In addition, the study raises concerns about polygamous marriages. According to Salunke (2014), polygamy is believed to be a result of the belief that a single woman cannot fulfil all the needs of her husband, thus requiring the presence of a co-wife. According to Shahin (2022), it has been found that numerous women in polygamous marriages face emotional and physical abuse. There are instances where individuals find themselves without any power and are left with no option but to accept the circumstances. In the narrative "A love slave," Susana finds herself married to a traditional healer who already has two wives. Susana never received any love or affection from her husband. The co-wives do not offer her any support due to their dislike for her. This marriage offered her no joy; instead, she was depicted as a victim of sexual exploitation (Ibrahim, 2024).

Moreover, traditional beliefs also dictate the roles and expectations placed on women. In traditional societies, women are typically assigned the role of being homemakers and working in agricultural or other labor-intensive fields. Rokanuzzaman (2020) highlights the prevailing perception that domestic duties are primarily assigned to women, with minimal or no participation from men. It can be truly heart-wrenching when someone favours one gender over another. When a male child is born in the Akan society of Ghana, it is expressed as "W' awo nipa," signifying the arrival of a new human being. This reinforces the notion of male dominance over females, highlighting the existence of a patriarchal system. Nevertheless, there are women who defy these norms and strive to achieve significant positions in their societies. In the novel "The River and the Source" by Margaret Ogola, Sharma & Chauhan (2023) highlight the portrayal of Akoko, the protagonist, whose personality challenges societal expectations of women. Akoko is a formidable woman who fearlessly challenges the institution of patriarchy. She challenges societal expectations by defying the stereotype that women should be limited to domestic roles and subservience to men. Her decision to have a smaller family than societal expectations has led to her mother-in-law accusing her of bewitching her husband.

Furthermore, certain cultural norms dictate that women should remain quiet or speak sparingly in the presence of men. This expectation based on gender significantly restricts women's capacity to express empowered responses (Saba, 2023). Nichols (2017) suggests that silence can be seen as a reflection of the historical suppression of women within the patriarchal system, where men hold power and women are often relegated to an inferior position. According to Atasoy (2020), the act of breaking the silence can be seen as a fitting metaphor for the writing of women in Africa. Semenov (2024) highlights the connection between women's social responsibilities and their ability to openly express their experiences, understanding, and desires. This connection can only be fully realised if the barriers of silence imposed upon these women are dismantled. African women's literature serves as a powerful medium for women to convey their perspectives, experiences, and insights on the issues that surround them. According to Farajallah et al (2015), it is evident that African women often face the consequences of oppression and neglect, and are expected to maintain a sense of silence and passivity to be considered virtuous. Quietness and docility are two key characteristics of virtuous women. She exhibits a tendency to remain passive and silent when confronted with significant changes, and she conforms to the societal expectations imposed on her by patriarchal norms.

Many women understand that the silence they experience is a result of patriarchal norms, yet they choose to remain quiet in order to uphold a sense of respect. Adichie's Purple Hibiscus explores the contrasting portrayals of two women: one who embodies traditional ideals of goodness, and another who represents authenticity and complexity. Beatrice is portrayed as a meek and submissive woman at the start of the novel, to the point where her own safety and the well-being of her pregnancy were put at risk. In contrast, Aunt Ifeoma is depicted as a strong and fearless woman who isn't afraid to speak out against injustice.

However, there are instances where the exploitation of women may be disguised as empowerment. A clear example of this is evident in the case of Joyce Banda, who became Malawi's first female president. Hussain & Hashmi (2023) have highlighted the deceptive nature of women's empowerment in politics, where the exploitation of women can often go unnoticed. Banda's path clearly illustrates how it was initially used as a means to further President Bingu wa Mutharika's goal of securing a second term in office. According to Siddiq (2023), after Mutharika's election, Joyce Banda faced criticism, marginalisation, and was eventually dismissed from the ruling party in 2010. Despite facing castigation and harassments, she went on to become Malawi's and Southern African Development Community's first female president, breaking barriers and making history. According to Alhamid (2022), Mutharika's decision to select a female presidential mate may have been perceived as a step towards promoting women's involvement in decision-making. However, it appears that his motive behind this move was primarily to gain support from female voters. Hence, it is crucial to explore how African fiction writers depict female characters who endure exploitation and ultimately find empowerment through their struggles.

In addition, it seems that women rely on their husbands for financial support. According to Williams (2014), a significant number of women who experience these difficulties lack access to education and sustainable employment opportunities. The concept of patriarchy perpetuates the belief in male superiority and reinforces women's reliance on men in every aspect of life. Power and authority are predominantly held by men in all aspects of family, society, and the state. Being economically independent is the only lasting solution to free them. In Nwapa’s novel Efuru, it is evident that Belle, a character who lacks formal education but possesses intelligence and wisdom, makes a decision not to join her husband in farming. Instead, she convinces him to engage in long distance trading, which requires less physical labour and generates higher financial returns. Thanks to her financial security, she was able to maintain a comfortable lifestyle even after her husband left her.

Belle's economic independence has empowered her to make autonomous choices regarding her lifestyle. She prioritises her own happiness over conforming to her husband's wishes to work on the farm. Ashanti women in Ghana also exemplify the issue of independence. Afsari & Omrani (2015) state that Ashanti women have historically played significant roles as traders, farmers, and politically engaged individuals, overseeing a complex market system network. The vegetable market is controlled and dominated through the Ohemma (female chief) structure of leadership. The Ashanti women live in a matriarchal society, where they consider their natal homes as their permanent residences. Their strongest bonds are with their mothers and children. Their earned trading positions and titles are passed on to their daughters. Women put in tremendous effort to support their children, ensuring they are well-fed and educated. According to the United Nations report from 2017, women in Africa are highly engaged in economic activities, with a significant presence in farming, labour, and entrepreneurship, surpassing other regions globally. They are responsible for the majority of agricultural activities and in certain countries, they constitute around 70% of the workforce.

While there is still work to be done to achieve gender equality, it is worth noting the progress made in this African case. The United Nations (2017) highlights the progress made by African women, such as increased female participation in legislatures. However, it also acknowledges the challenges they continue to face, particularly in terms of higher rates of sexual violence.

In Namibia, the position of influence in pre-colonial communities was predominantly held by men, with a few exceptions. Men also tended to have greater economic decision-making power within extended family units. According to Becker (n.d.), there were significant changes that occurred after independence. According to Becker (n.d.), women have been given roles as headwomen, senior headwomen, and traditional councillors since independence, although they still make up a smaller portion. Women have also started to break free from the confines of invisibility and silence that they were once subjected to in traditional settings such as customary, court hearings, and community meetings. The analysis of literature in relation to feminist themes highlights women's determination to overcome societal oppression and assert their capabilities in both personal and public realms. Women writers create female characters who are capable, resilient, and accomplished, even in the face of male characters who resist acknowledging gender equality and cling to traditional beliefs. The analyses provided here focus solely on feminist perspectives, which highlights a gap in the examination of rhetoric that needs to be addressed. Therefore, the outcome is an analysis of feminist rhetoric in the chosen novels. Gyawali (2023) highlights the lack of recognition given to women's rhetorical contributions and the limited scholarly analysis and critique of the current discourse surrounding women's rights in public.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**ANALYSIS OF SELECTED PRIMARY TEXTS**

**My Last Duchess Analysis**

**Section 1**

Lines 1-15

That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall,

Looking as if she were alive. I call

That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf’s hands

Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

Will ‘t please you sit and look at her? I said

‘Frà Pandolf’ by design, for never read

Strangers like you that pictured countenance,

The depth and passion of its earnest glance,

But to myself they turned (since none puts by

The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)

And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,

How such a glance came there; so, not the first

Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, ‘t was not

Her husband’s presence only, called that spot

Of joy into the Duchess’ cheek: perhaps

The opening of My Last Duchess features the speaker politely inviting a listener to take a seat and observe a portrait of his previous Duchess. Readers may find themselves questioning the reason behind the Duchess no longer being his current Duchess. He doesn't disclose her current whereabouts or status.

The speaker invites their listener to take a seat and observe the life-sized painting of her. The author explains that the painting is concealed behind a curtain, and only he has the privilege of unveiling it to others. This behaviour raises some concerns. The reader can quickly perceive the Duke's domineering nature. One lingering question remains: why is this his final Duchess?

The Duke vividly portrays the expression on the Duchess' face, noting her joyful countenance and sincere gaze. The author observes that it was not just the presence of her husband that brought a smile to the Duchess' face. This statement is quite intriguing. What made him think that his mere presence would be enough to bring a smile to her face? Although he doesn't directly address that question, his acknowledgment of this provides some insight into why he was the sole person permitted to unveil the curtain.

From the very beginning, his sole desire was to be the source of happiness for his Duchess. With her safely tucked away and her life-size painting proudly displayed on the wall, he relished the exclusive privilege of being the sole witness to the pure joy captured on her face. No one else would be granted permission to gaze upon the painting without his consent. Out of nowhere, our speaker takes on a rather unsettling demeanour.

**Section 2**

**Lines 16-24**

Frà Pandolf chanced to say, ‘Her mantle laps

Over my lady’s wrist too much,’ or ‘Paint

Must never hope to reproduce the faint

Half-flush that dies along her throat:’ such stuff

Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough

For calling up that spot of joy. She had

A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,

Too easily impressed; she liked whate’er

She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.

The Duke reflects on his past Duchess and the aspects that troubled him. She appeared to be overly satisfied with the people around her. The Duke expressed his dissatisfaction with this situation. The narrator expresses disapproval of the fact that the subject would blush if someone like "Fra Pandolf" were to comment on her shawl covering her wrists.

The Duke was displeased by her tendency to blush in response to the flirtations of other men. He was displeased by the fact that the acts he considered to be basic politeness would always bring a radiant smile to her face. The Duke claims that she is too quick to find joy and too easily influenced.

He found it frustrating that she seemed to enjoy everything she saw. The portrayal of the man in My Last Duchess becomes increasingly unsettling and domineering. It appears that he decided to distance himself from his Duchess due to his inability to manage her emotions. He desired to be the sole source of her happiness and the cause of her blushing.

**Section 3**

**Lines 25 -35**

Sir, ‘t was all one! My favour at her breast,

The dropping of the daylight in the West,

The bough of cherries some officious fool

Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule

She rode with round the terrace—all and each

Would draw from her alike the approving speech,

Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked

Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked

My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name

With anybody’s gift. Who’d stoop to blame

This sort of trifling?

The lines of My Last Duchess provide further insight into the Duke's critique of the Duchess' character. According to him, she holds her white mule, a branch of cherries, and sunset in the same high regard as a piece of jewellery he had gifted her. He is frustrated by her apparent lack of appreciation for his efforts and the disparity between her enjoyment of simple pleasures and his extravagant gifts. He appears frustrated by her apparent lack of understanding regarding his significance in life.

Through their marriage, he bestowed upon her a name that carried the weight of nine centuries. It is evident that his family has a long-standing history, which is why he bestowed upon her a name that is both renowned and esteemed when they got married. It appeared that she didn't show any more gratitude for this than she did for watching the sunset. The Duke was so irritated by this that he refused to engage in a discussion with her, considering it beneath him. He believes it would be insignificant to do so.

**Section 4**

**Lines 35-47**

Even had you skill

In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will

Quite clear to such an one, and say, ‘Just this

Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,

Or there exceed the mark’—and if she let

Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set

Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,

—E’en then would be some stooping; and I choose

Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,

Whene’er I passed her; but who passed without

Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;

Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands

As if alive. Will ‘t please you rise? We’ll meet

The Duke elaborates on his decision to refrain from discussing with his Duchess the reasons for his deep disgust towards her. However, he appears to be at ease discussing it with this listener. Maybe he believed he was too superior to engage in conversation with a woman, even if that woman happened to be his wife. He acknowledged that she greeted him with a pleasant smile as he walked by, but he found it unsettling that she bestowed the same smile upon everyone. The author described how he issued orders and suddenly, all the smiles vanished simultaneously. The reader is compelled to sympathise with the Duchess, and for good reason.

She exuded a warm and joyful presence. The Duke's command had a profound effect on her, causing her smile to vanish completely. His controlling attitude robbed her of her joy. The Duke, after recounting the events that unfolded when he gave her a command, shifts his focus back to the painting on the wall and remarks, "She stands there, appearing almost lifelike." It can be inferred that the original Duchess is no longer living. The Duke appears to derive satisfaction from possessing a painting of her, as it allows him to dictate who has the privilege of witnessing the delight on her countenance. The Duke graciously extends an invitation to his listener to accompany him back downstairs.

**Section 5**

**Lines 47-56**

The company below then. I repeat,

The Count your master’s known munificence

Is ample warrant that no just pretence

Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;

Though his fair daughter’s self, as I avowed

At starting, is my object. Nay, we’ll go

Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,

Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,

Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

The section of My Last Duchess provides insight into the person the Duke is speaking to. The protagonist serves a nobleman in the kingdom, and their main objective is to orchestrate a union between the Duke and the nobleman's daughter. The Duke refers to his daughter as his "fair daughter" and describes her as his "object". He escorts the man back downstairs, taking the opportunity to proudly showcase the bronze statue that was custom-made for him.

The statue depicts Neptune gracefully taming a majestic sea horse. Neptune, undoubtedly, reigns as the deity of the sea. The Duke is represented by this symbol, while the sea horse represents any Duchess he might marry. The Duke sees himself as an all-powerful being, determined to control his wife's every action and manipulate her emotions to suit his desires. The speaker in My Last Duchess sheds light on Browning's perception of his fellow men, portraying a character who is evidently disturbed and possessive.

**Analysis of Literary Devices in “My Last Duchess”**

The analysis of some of the literary devices used in this poem has been detailed below.

**Assonance:** Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in the same line such as the sound of /o/ in “Her wits to your, forsooth, and made excuses” and the sound of /i/ and /o/ in “Of mine for dowry will be disallowed”.

**Symbolism:** Symbolism is using symbols to signify ideas and qualities, giving them symbolic meanings different from literal meanings. The painting of the Duke’s last Duchess symbolizes how he objectifies women as property or possessions. “White mule” symbolizes her innocence and purity. “Taming a sea-horse” is a symbol of Duke taming his wife.

**Enjambment:** Enjambment refers to the continuation of a sentence without the pause beyond the end of a line, couplet or stanza such as:

“The Count your master’s known munificence

Is ample warrant that no just pretense

Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;”

**Consonance:** Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line such as the sound of /t/ in “Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though” and the sound of /n/ in “The Count your master’s known munificence.”

Irony: Irony is a figure of speech in which words are used in such a way that their intended meaning is different from the actual meaning of the words. The title is ironic because the dead mistress is not his last lady, as he is going to marry again.

**Simile:** Simile is a device used to compare something with something else to make the meanings clear. There is only one simile used in this poem. For example,

“That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall,

Looking as if she were alive.”

**Hyperbole:** Hyperbole is a device used to exaggerate a statement for the sake of emphasis. The poet has used hyperbole in the line twenty-four, “She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.”

Alliteration: Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line such as the sound of /d/ in “The dropping of the daylight in the West” and the sound of /s/ in “Then all the smiles stopped together There she stands”.

Euphemism: A euphemism is a polite expression used in place of words or phrases that might otherwise be considered harsh or unpleasant. For example,

“Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;

Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands.”

**Analysis of Poetic Devices in “My Last Duchess”**

Poetic and literary devices are the same, but a few are used only in poetry. Here is the analysis of some of the poetic devices used in this poem.

**Stanza:** A stanza is a poetic form of some lines. There is one long stanza in the poem having fifty-six lines in it.

**Iambic Pentameter:** It is a type of meter having five iambs per line. The poem follows iambic pentameter such as, “looking as if she were alive I call”.

**End Rhyme:** End rhyme is used to make the stanza melodious. The examples of end rhyme in the poem are, “wall/call”, “hands/stands” and “meet/repeat”.

**Heroic Couplet:** Heroic couplet is a pair of rhymed lines with iambic pentameter. The poem consists of twenty-eight heroic couplets. For example,

“Strangers like you that pictured countenance,

The depth and passion of its earnest glance,”

**TO HIS COY MISTRESS**

**Detailed Analysis**

Lines 1-20

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;

A 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.

The opening lines of this poem consist of ten couplets, following a traditional format. However, the poem itself does not aim for grandeur, as it takes the form of a love poem with a more straightforward desire. The gentleman simply wishes for his lady to succumb to his sexual advances. This use of the traditional love elegy format, also known as 'carpe diem' poetry, may be seen as ironic. Despite being written during a time when expressing emotions was not common, the poem stands out for its beautiful language and intense admiration of the woman's beauty. This demonstrates a level of respect that was quite forward-thinking for its era.

The man starts by describing his admiration for the lady and how he would express his devotion to her if given the opportunity. The author skillfully transforms their affection into something beyond the capacity of the poem, employing phrases like 'love you ten years before the Flood' to give it a biblical quality. The use of 'vegetable love' illustrates its gradual and steady growth, alluding to significant progress. Furthermore, the author declares that they would spend a hundred years extolling her, from her eyes to her forehead, two hundred years adoring her breasts, and 'thirty thousand to the rest'. Above all, To His Coy Mistress refrains from belittling or ridiculing the lady's appearance, unlike Shakespeare's 'My Mistress' Eyes are Nothing Like the Sun'. This distinction is important because metaphysical poetry served a different purpose. The speaker's affection for the lady is elevated to a divine level through the use of an erotic blazon, inspired by Petrarchan love poetry. This portrayal represents the depth of love that the man believes he can attain.

**Lines 21-32**

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.

The mood of To His Coy Mistress undergoes a sudden shift in the following lines. The poet's approach in the beginning was unhurried, allowing for a detailed description of the woman's beauty and the ways she deserved admiration. This resulted in a poem that flows smoothly and maintains a relaxed pace throughout. In these lines, the tone takes a different turn as the poet becomes more impassioned and desperate. He warns the lady that he senses the imminent approach of time's winged chariot, drawing upon Greek mythology to elevate his beloved even further.

In this piece, the poet expresses admiration for his woman's beauty while acknowledging that he is unable to fully devote himself to her due to the constant passage of time. The future holds desolate landscapes for them, where her beauty will wither and her purity will crumble, along with her dignity. The anticipation, it seems, will be in vain. There is a subtle sense of foreboding present.

**Lines 33-46**

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-chapped power.

Let us roll all our strength and all

Our sweetness up into one ball,

And tear our pleasures with rough strife

Through the iron gates of life:

Thus, though we cannot make our sun

Stand still, yet we will make him run.

Nevertheless, in the final set of lines, there is a noticeable shift in mood as the poet presents a solution. It's important for them to cherish this moment, to fully embrace their youth and beauty, and not worry about what lies ahead. The poet encourages his lady love to engage in a pleasurable activity together, using a word commonly associated with intimacy during the 17th century. The author portrays them as 'amorous birds of prey', highlighting their instinctual and passionate nature. This depiction positions them as both superior to and inferior to humans.

The final lines of the poem depict a vivid portrayal of intense emotions. The poet expresses a desire to forcefully seize pleasure and overcome the obstacles of life, showcasing the immense power of their passion. The final set of lines showcases exceptional poetic skill, conveying a heartfelt plea to make the most of one's time. Despite the serious message, the poet maintains a cheerful tone throughout.

**Analysis of Literary Devices in “To His Coy Mistress”**

literary devices are tools that enable the writers to present their ideas, emotions, and feelings with the use of these devices. Andrew Marvel has also used some literary elements in this poem to adore the beauty of his mistress. The analysis of some of the literary devices used in this poem has been analyzed below.

**Assonance:** Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in the same line such as the sound of /ou/ in “And you should, if you please, refuse”.

**Imagery:** Imagery is used to make the readers perceive things with their five senses. For example, “Thou by the Indian Ganges’ side”; “Time’s wingèd chariot hurrying near”; “Deserts of vast eternity” and “then worms shall try that long-preserved virginity”.

**Consonance**: Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line such as the sound of /l/ in “And while thy willing soul transpires”.

**Metaphor:** It is a figure of speech used to compare two objects that are different. There are two metaphors used in this poem. The first is used in the fourth line, “To walk, and pass our long love’s day” where he compares the life span of his and his mistress to one day. The second is used in the eleventh line, “My vegetable love should grow” where he compares his love with slow growth of vegetables.

**Hyperbole:** Hyperbole is a device used to exaggerate a statement for the sake of emphasis. The poet has used hyperbole in the fifteenth line, “Two hundred to adore each breast.”

**Simile:** There is only one simile used in this poem. In the line thirty-four “Sits on thy skin like morning dew” the poet compares woman’s youthful skin to morning dew.

**Enjambment:** Enjambment refers to the continuation of a sentence without the pause beyond the end of a line, couplet or stanza. For example,

“But at my back I always hear

Time’s wingèd chariot hurrying near;”

The literary analysis shows that the poet has sketched a very vivid and realistic picture of the transience of life and his quest for love.

**Analysis of Poetic Devices in “To His Coy Mistress”**

Poetic and literary devices are the same, but a few are used only in poetry. Here is the analysis of some of the poetic devices used in this poem.

**Stanza:** A stanza is a poetic form of some lines. There are three stanzas in this poem: lines 1 – 20, lines 21 – 32, and lines 33 – 46.

**Rhyme Scheme:** The rhyme scheme followed by the entire poem is AABB.

**Iambic Tetrameter:** It is a type of meter having four iambs in it. The entire poem follows iambic tetrameter such as, “Had we but world enough, and time.”

**End Rhyme:** End Rhyme is used to make the stanza melodious. End rhyme occurs within the second and third lines and again within the second and fourth lines. The rhyming words are, “Time”, “crime”, “way” and “day.”

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**COMPARISON OF TEXT AND AUTHORS**

The portrayal of women in poetry has long been dominated by male poets such as Robert Browning and Andrew Marvell, who have crafted their masterpieces within this patriarchal tradition. The poems vividly depict the objectification of the female body and the way women are portrayed, disguised as romantic poetry. This essay will analyse the similarities in the treatment of the female subject in the poems "To His Coy Mistress" by Andrew Marvell and "My Last Duchess" by Robert Browning. The poems subtly reveal a deep longing to gaze upon a woman who remains veiled, elusive, and beyond reach. Although the poems may seem different at first glance, there is a hidden connection between them that becomes apparent when examining the tone of the narrators, their portrayal of their obsession, and their treatment of the female body. The paper presents the theses that explore the resemblances and divergences between the two poems, ultimately arguing for their thematic similarities.

**Female social subjugation**

The narrators in both poems share a striking similarity in their voices. They both display a strong sense of self-importance and exhibit sexist attitudes. The woman, who becomes the centre of attention for both narrators, serves as the elusive muse that the poets strive to immortalise in their verses. These dramatic monologues portray narrators who are dominating and egotistical, disregarding a woman's wishes as insignificant. Duke Ferrara reveals the portrait of his late wife to the envoy, a hidden treasure that he keeps away from prying eyes. The duke is a man filled with pride, believing that his former duchess was too carefree, easily satisfied, and too quick to share her smiles with unfamiliar faces. The narrator exudes a sense of superiority, dismissing the significance of female existence. The author effectively portrays a chilling moment by stating, "I gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together" (Browning 45-46). The duke's masculine pride diminishes the duchess, reducing her to nothing more than a painting. He takes pride in his ability to make her stop smiling with a single command. The narrator portrays the female demeanour as being heavily influenced by the man's desires.

He exerts control over the female 'other,' both physically and emotionally, establishing himself as the dominant figure. Marvell's poem also reflects a rejection of the female identity. The narrator in Marvell's work attempts to captivate his mistress, first with tender expressions of affection, and later with unsettling and macabre descriptions in an effort to assert control over her. In this instance as well, the narrator attempts to seek sexual favour from his mistress, even when she is hesitant and unwilling to engage in physical relations. The narrator's apparent acceptance of her negation is a fallacy that the poet skillfully presents through the use of words like "lady" and "if you ... refuse" (Marvell 2-9). Nevertheless, it would have been more appropriate for the narrator to respect the woman's denial, as is customary in courtly love. He relentlessly pursues her with unwavering determination. He persistently seeks her affection despite her rejection: "And even if you choose to decline / ... "My vegetable love should grow" (9-11). It appears that the narrator had difficulty accepting the lady's rejection and persisted in pursuing her. Similar to the narrator in "Last Duchess", the narrator in this piece also believes that his desires are more important than the woman's refusal. They both argue that the female 'other' lacked an independent identity and was merely seen as an extension of the male 'self', thus being treated as a man's possession.

**The perspectives and perceptions surrounding women**

The portrayal of women in the poems is characterised by their lighthearted and playful nature. The narrator in Browning's poem openly admits to the foreign envoy that his previous wife was quick to find joy and easily influenced. Duke Ferrara was not pleased with her casual demeanour and pleasant nature. He felt entitled to his wife's love and attention, believing it should be exclusively his. The duchess's lack of discrimination in her choice of recipients for her "speech" or "blush" greatly angered the duke (33-34). The duke's overwhelming sense of possessiveness prevented him from being able to tolerate the Duchess's friendly smiles towards other men.

The narrator did not feel love towards the natural female beauty in her smiles, blushes, or sweet manners. On the contrary, the duchess's mild and compassionate nature seems to be causing a great deal of anger. The character traits that the duke found displeasing in the duchess exemplified the essence of femininity and thus contributed to her sense of self. On the other hand, the duke strongly denies her character and doubts her loyalty (Gardner 166). In "Coy Mistress," Marvell's narrator perceives his mistress's "coyness" as a display of her flirtatious nature. He firmly believes that she was enjoying his overt sexual advances, despite her rejection of them. Both narrators express a belief in the captivating nature of women. They lack seriousness and playfully evade any sense of moral integrity.

**Chastity**

The objectification of the female body is an additional aspect that is evident in both of the poems. The poetic creations in question possess a certain allure that can be described as voyeuristic, captivating both the poet and the readers alike. The vivid physical description of the women serves to exemplify the manifestation of the male gaze upon the female body. Within the literary work entitled "Last Duchess," we find ourselves immersed in a scene where the esteemed duke and the distinguished foreign envoy, both individuals of the male gender, engage in the act of observing a remarkably realistic depiction of the duchess. The painting serves as a voyeuristic window through which the male gaze critically assesses the female form. The aforementioned line, "Will 't please you sit and look at her," can be interpreted as a cordial invitation extended by the duke to the envoy, urging him to partake in the act of observing and admiring the artistic representation of the duchess through her portrait (Browning). The invitation presented here appears to be in direct opposition to the inherent possessive tendencies exhibited by the duke, as conveyed through the medium of the poem. Contrary to popular belief, he derives great pleasure from the spectacle. The utilisation of lexemes such as "depth of passion" pertaining to the duchess's countenance, the envoy's discernment of her "earnest glance," and the conspicuous manifestation of a "blush" on her "cheeks" was, in actuality, a deliberate tactic employed to captivate the envoy's focus on her corporeal attributes (9-15). The deliberate act of directing the reader's attention towards the physical form of the duchess serves to illustrate the voyeuristic gratification that the narrator derived from this public display of the artwork. Marvell’s narrator in “Coy Mistress” gives a vivid description of his mistress’s physical attributes:

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. (13-18)

This particular depiction of the female physique exhibits a conspicuous absence of any inclination towards romantic entanglement. Instead, one may argue that the poet's purportedly passionate address is merely a facade, as it is swiftly dismissed in the opening lines of the third stanza. Here, the poet reveals his true perception of his mistress, asserting that her beauty is nothing more than a pile of ashes (Cousins 398). The heightened awareness of the protagonist's perception towards his mistress is evident as he employs a metaphorical comparison to illustrate her futile endeavours in preserving her chastity, deeming it as a mere folly that will ultimately result in the decay of her long-preserved virginity (27-30).

Henceforth, the individual in question posits that the aesthetic appeal of a female individual shall cease to exist and shall transform her erstwhile esteemed reputation into mere particles of detritus and remnants of combustion, should she persistently decline the romantic overtures of a suitor (25-30). The narrator's depiction of the woman's cadaver as an object of desire is quite intriguing. The use of the phrase "long-preserved virginity" (28-29) suggests a certain fascination with the physical decay and the inevitable consumption by worms. This morbid imagery adds a layer of complexity to the narrator's perception of the woman's remains.

It is evident from the text that the narrator holds the belief that a woman's desirability is contingent solely upon her physical attractiveness, and that once she reaches old age, her allure diminishes entirely. Both of the narrators hold the belief that the beauty of women is confined to the surface level of their skin. Their observation, which can be characterised as voyeuristic, serves to reveal their particular understanding of the concept of feminine beauty and allure. Both narrators overtly exhibit the woman's physique for the purpose of voyeuristic observation through their choice of language and expressions within the poem.

**Views of themselves**

The narrators of the poems serve as a reflective surface, offering insight into the poet's perspective on gender. Marvell's astutely crafted and sensually charged poem adeptly conceals the genuine disposition of the poet beneath the persona of the narrator. Nevertheless, the poem portrays the poet's profound aversion towards the female form (Cousins 399). The physical descriptions pertaining to feminine grace and virtue serve as an ironic portrayal of the coarse depiction of the female physique. In a similar vein, Browning, by means of his narrator, articulates his perspective regarding women. The author's perspective on feminine behaviour is intriguingly infused with Victorian moral principles (Gardner 167).

Both poets demonstrate a lack of regard for the female identity and actively dismiss its existence through their explicit displays of masculine dominance towards the female 'other'. By portraying frivolity and flirtatiousness as the primary characteristics of female characters, the poets illustrate the perception that women are confined by their societal roles and are expected to endure male dominance. The deliberate inclusion of the male gaze within the poems can be interpreted as a manifestation of a sexist trope. This trope serves to amplify the narrator's, and consequently the poet's, misogynistic perspective towards women. Conclusively, both the literary works titled "Last Duchess" and "Coy Mistress" exhibit a tendency to diminish the significance of the female physique, portraying it as a mere object subjected to the dominion of man. Consequently, this portrayal negates the possibility of women attaining a distinct and autonomous identity.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

**5.1 Summary**

'To His Coy Mistress' by Andrew Marvell elucidates the arduous endeavours undertaken by a gentleman in his unwavering pursuit of eliciting the reciprocation of affection from his reticent paramour. The anonymous "Coy Mistress" adamantly declines engaging in any intimate relations with the gentleman in question. In response, he asserts that given an ample amount of time, he would dedicate countless centuries to marvelling at her exquisite beauty and unspoiled purity. Nevertheless, the brevity of human existence necessitates the recognition that temporal constraints limit one's opportunities. Consequently, individuals ought to seize the present moment and derive satisfaction from their interpersonal connections, for once deceased, the capacity to engage in physical embraces or experience pleasure becomes unattainable. By engaging in the act of affection towards one another, individuals have the potential to maximise their limited duration of existence on this planet, consequently enabling them to achieve personal growth and significance within the earthly realm.

Metaphysical poetry, exemplified by works like 'To His Coy Mistress', emerged as a distinct genre in the late 17th century. It is characterised by its emphasis on the use of 'conceit', a literary device wherein two dissimilar objects are juxtaposed in order to create a perplexing and intricate relationship between them. Yet another fundamental principle of metaphysical poetry encompassed the contemplation of subjects that transcend simplistic categorizations. Love, religion, faith, belief, and numerous related themes were widely explored by poets of this genre. The majority of metaphysical poets were not commonly recognised during their time as metaphysical poets, nor did they establish a comparable unified movement akin to the Romantics of the late 18th century. Moreover, they were generally regarded as excessively meticulous in their manner of expression. Their work, while undoubtedly evoking strong emotions and leaving a profound impact, regrettably fell short in fully articulating the expansive ideals that underlie their literary endeavours.

On the contrary, the poem titled 'My Last Duchess' authored by the esteemed Robert Browning, The present composition is predicated upon historical occurrences pertaining to Alfonso, the Duke of Ferrara, who resided during the 16th century. The speaker of the poem is none other than the illustrious Duke himself. He graciously informs us that he is currently engaged in the delightful task of entertaining an esteemed emissary. This distinguished guest has been sent to engage in negotiations regarding the Duke's forthcoming nuptials, which, it is worth noting, are necessitated by the lamentable demise of his previous spouse. The fortunate lady in question happens to be the daughter of a highly influential family, thus rendering this union a matter of great significance. As the esteemed gentleman graciously guides his esteemed guest through the magnificent halls of his regal abode, he pauses with great reverence before a captivating depiction of the deceased Duchess, who, by all accounts, was a youthful and resplendent maiden. The Duke initiates a reflective discourse regarding the portrait sessions, subsequently delving into a contemplation of the Duchess herself. The individual's contemplations transition into an extensive and vehement verbal attack concerning the subject's reprehensible conduct: the individual asserts that the subject engaged in flirtatious behaviour with every individual encountered and failed to acknowledge the individual's bestowal of a name that has endured for nine centuries. As the monologue progresses, the discerning reader gradually comprehends, with an increasingly disconcerting conviction, that the Duke, in truth, was the catalyst for the premature demise of the Duchess. It becomes apparent that as her conduct became more audacious, the Duke took decisive action, issuing commands that abruptly terminated all expressions of joy on her countenance. Upon making this disclosure, the Duke promptly redirects his attention to the matter at hand, which involves the organisation and coordination of yet another matrimonial union, this time with a youthful maiden. Upon the conclusion of their perusal of the painting, the Duke proceeds to draw the attention of the emissary towards various other noteworthy masterpieces adorning his esteemed collection.

Within the initial verses of the poem, the orator conveys to the reader the presence of an emissary whose purpose is to engage in negotiations pertaining to a prospective matrimonial alliance on behalf of the Duke. The author further elucidates upon his recent nuptials, which were instigated by his encounter with a depiction of his deceased spouse. The author posits that she engaged in an action that did not meet his approval and subsequently caused him dissatisfaction with her conduct. Ultimately, the demise of the Duchess has transpired, thereby leaving the Duke with the arduous task of selecting a suitable successor to fulfil the role of his betrothed.

**5.2. Conclusion**

Conclusively, The Last Duchess authored by the esteemed Robert Browning is an exemplary work of art that aptly demonstrates the poet's remarkable prowess in employing language and various literary devices. The poem can be characterised as a dramatic monologue, replete with rich imagery and symbolism, which serves to present readers with a vivid portrayal of the Duke of Ferrara's profound fixation and intense envy directed towards his deceased spouse. The central theme of the poem pertains to the Duke's inclination towards possessiveness, exertion of power, and exercise of control over his wife, who is depicted as being diminished to a mere object of ownership. It is widely acknowledged by a majority of critics that the poem "To His Coy Mistress" falls within the realm of traditional carpe diem love poetry. However, it is important to note that there exists a dissenting opinion among certain critics who perceive it as an ironic commentary on sexual seduction. The presence of a light-hearted mood within the poem serves as a bolstering factor for this alternative interpretation. Moreover, it is worth noting that the juxtaposition of death imagery with a lighthearted perspective is a characteristic feature of metaphysical poetry. However, it may not align with the conventions of carpe diem poetry, a genre that primarily emphasises seizing the present moment and celebrating life.

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