

To His Coy Mistress
by Andrew Marvell

Consider the title. What might you infer about the poem's speaker? Who is the speaker addressing? What do we know about her? What do you predict the poem will be about?

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 winged 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 preserv'd 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 am'rous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour,
Than languish in his slow-chapp'd 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.

Notes on Structure

How is the poem structured? What do you notice about its form? Does it rhyme? How many stanzas does it have? What is the main assertion in each stanza of this poem?

Allusions

Find as many allusions in the poem as you can. What is the speaker referring to? What is his purpose in making these allusions?

Imagery

Using two different colors (highlighters/pens), mark the imagery in each stanza. Use one color to mark images with a positive connotation. Use the other color to mark images with a negative connotation. What pattern do you see? What do you think this means?

Tone

In the left margin next to each stanza, write a word that describes the tone of each stanza. How do the shifts in tone relate to the meaning of the poem?

Poetry Elements

Identify poetic elements of the poem (simile, metaphor, personification, etc.) Mark them in the poem and comment on the effect/meaning of each.

Syllogism Summary

Try to summarize the meaning of the poem in the form of a syllogism. What is the theme of this poem? Can you think of a modern day song that shares this theme?