Andrew Marvell

To His Coy Mistress (1621 - 1678)

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 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 conspires
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-chapt pow'r.

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.
9. Using arguments out of the _carpe diem_ (literally, "seize the day") tradition, the poem has an apparently logical structure (if—but—therefore), its main images turning on the time and space motifs introduced in line 1.

1. The Humber is a river in northern England; it suggests the other end of the world from the Ganges.

8. Slowly devouring; the slow jaws of, e.g., birds of prey (cf. line 38) or of the god Kronos (mistakenly identified in the Renaissance with Time) who, fearing his children, swallowed them.


1. The three actions in lines 38-46 include imaginative conquest of time and space (ball as "sphere" or "world"), while recognizing that the "rough strife"

now envisaged (including deflation) must defy both time and world. The sun stood still for Joshua (10:12) and for Zeus and Alcmene when they conceived Hercules.