

# AQA English Literature A-level

Poetry: Love Through the Ages  
Anthology (Pre-1900)  
Andrew Marvell: 'To His Coy Mistress'

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## Brief Summary

“To his Coy Mistress” is a **‘carpe diem’** metaphysical poem by Andrew Marvell. The phrase ‘carpe diem’, translates as **‘seize the day’** in Latin, which puts emphasis on the poem’s allusion to living in the moment. Marvell uses this poetic form as a way of **persuading the mistress** that time is short and **she should partake in sexual acts**.

## Synopsis

### Summary

**Context** – Written in 1650s just after the Civil War (1640s)// Marvell lived through the interregnum and political turmoil which he narrowly avoided // Known to disappear on travels for periods of time in Europe // Politics have a large impact on his life - which is why he removes that aspect in this poem

**Structure** - Rhyme scheme - First 10 lines follow scheme aabbccdde which repeats throughout, each rhyming couplet designed to feel separate from each other// mainly iambic tetrameter that is regular for the bulk of the poem //no fixed form throughout - 3 stanzas at different lengths

**Language** –Personification// simile// Hyperbole// Metaphor// Allusion// Caesura

**Key Points** – Time is finite// Physical intimacy is important // “Carpe diem” - beginning of a new style of poetry // Geographical allusions create a seductive, intellectual argument

- Marvell begins by addressing a woman who appears slow in responding to his romantic advances. He argues that if time did not exist, he could court her forever and admire every aspect of her being. However, the fact is that a life unencumbered by the **constraints of mortality** does not exist.
- In the second stanza he takes time to **lament the briefness of human life**. He asserts that once dead, it is impossible to embrace and lovers cannot enjoy one and other anymore.
- In the last stanza, the speaker **asks the woman to embrace his romantic efforts** and they will be able to make the most of the short life bestowed upon them.
- The speaker paints her as not simply unwilling **“coy”** (line 2) - a term that means “feigning shyness or modesty in an attempt to seem alluring”. Thus, according to the speaker, his partner may want to engage in sexual acts; she is only pretending she does not want to.
- The poem uses **rhyming iambic tetrameter couplets** throughout. At the time, **“Heroic Verse”** - which involved rhyming iambic pentameter couplets - was popular. ‘To His Coy Mistress’ falls just short of that and seems to be mocking that style, which is typical of a **satirist** such as Marvell. The rhyming tetrameter couplets also allow the poem to become more fluent, free and playful.
- Marvell plays with ideas that introduce the ‘carpe diem’ theme. Marvell speaks of his worldly experience, travels and intellect to encourage his mistress.
- The poem is fast paced, reflecting the speaker’s wish for things to happen pronto.



## Context

### Historical Context

- The poem was written in the **1650s** during the period of the **English Interregnum**.
  - o The Interregnum was the period between the execution of Charles I in January 1649 and the arrival of his son Charles II in London in May 1660 which marked a change in period to Restoration.
  - o During the Interregnum, England underwent various forms of republican government which meant it was a relatively unstable time for the country.
- Marvell had controversial views on both sides of the civil war and created many **satirical poems** which were much too controversial and so could only be **published posthumously**. “To his Coy Mistress” is one of these poems.
- Despite living under Charles II, Royalist rule, and Cromwell’s rule and Parliamentarians rule, Marvell consistently managed to avoid punishment.
- It is important to note that in “To his Coy Mistress” there are **no political references**. It seems here that Marvell attempts to separate the political and personal aspects of his life.

### Literary Context

- “To his Coy Mistress” is a **Metaphysical poem**. It was written by Andrew Marvell either during or just before the English Interregnum (1621-2678) and published posthumously in 1681. Although the exact date of writing is unknown, it is estimated that Marvell wrote the poem in the 1650s.
- Metaphysical poetry is **highly intellectual**, makes use of **strange imagery** (see for example, the references to worms gaining his mistress’ virginity) and **frequent paradox**. They also contain **complicated thought** and are often **witty** and **elaborate** in style. Notable metaphysical poets include George Herbert and John Donne.
- Marvell also borrows from the **Petrarchan sonnet** form: beginning in line 11, he breaks his lover’s body into parts (blazon), which he then praises. This was a device typical of Petrarchan sonnets.
- Marvell uses a combination of love poetry devices and philosophical thought to create a **metaphysical seduction poem**. This fits in nicely with the other poems in the anthology. ‘**Sonnet 116**’ broaches the passing of time, while ‘**The Flea**’ is another metaphysical poem dealing with seduction and lust.



## Andrew Marvell

- An English **metaphysical poet, satirist and politician** who sat in the House of Commons.
- During the Commonwealth period he was close friends with John Milton.
- Marvell was **not especially popular** during his lifetime as a poet. The style of his work was **out of fashion** by the time he died but he was a **pioneer in political satire**. He was a huge inspiration for later writers such as John Dryden and Alexander Pope.
- Marvell was known to disappear for periods of time in Europe. These European excursions gave him masses of worldly knowledge and experience.
- During his life, his satirical writing won him a reputation as a **patriotic political writer**, an intelligent and courageous **enemy of court corruption** and a defender of religious and political liberty and the rights of Parliament.
- Although Marvell became a Parliamentarian and was opposed to episcopacy (a hierarchical form of Church governance used by many of the major Christian Churches and denominations such as Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Anglican), he was not a Puritan (English Protestant in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries). Later in life, he seemed to be a conforming Anglican. In some of his works, his religious views are significant.

## Marvell's poetic style

- Marvell **adhered to established stylised forms of neoclassical tradition**.
  - One such is the carpe diem lyric tradition which is seen in “To his Coy Mistress”.
  - He **infused** these familiar forms with **unique reflections** and explorations of larger questions about life and death.
- TS Eliot identified Marvell and the metaphysical school of thought with “the **dissociation of sensibility**” which took place in the English literature of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He drew a **comparison between the “intellectual poet” and the “reflective poet”**, suggesting that poets of that period developed a **self-consciousness** of their position within literary tradition. This meant that poets began to write with **renewed emphasis on the craftsmanship** of literary expression and freedom by making reference to **Classical and Biblical sources**.
- “To his Coy Mistress” combines an old poetic conceit (carpe diem philosophy) with linguistic features such as strange, fantastic imagery, personification of abstract entities, etc.



## “Carpe diem”

- The poem is classed as “carpe diem”, meaning in Latin “**seize the day**”. The mode follows poems written during the time of the Romans by poets such as Horace.
- In this case, the carpe diem philosophy finds expression in urging a woman to enjoy life before death takes her.



Begins with hypothetical situation. 'Would' is a modal verb and 'Had we' is in the subjunctive - the speaker consistently references that this is not a possibility as time is constantly running out.

The Ganges is considered sacred and holy, the speaker is saying she is by the Holy Ganges while he is simply the "Tide Of Humber" in Hull, the latter being much less fascinating and exotic.

The recent exploration and conquest of the British empire and India as a result - links to ideas of conquest (could allude to him conquering her virginity)

Refuse presumably means refuse sexual relations - language is coded due to social context

In Christian terms the 'conversion of Jews' essentially refers to the end of the world - it will never happen, Speaker talking about the gap between over 4000 years ago and the end of the world, massively hyperbolic and may be making a comment on love poetry that uses similar grand language seriously.

Speaker says that he would be content with her refusing - attempting to convince her he's not only after sex?

Breaking down a woman's body down into parts by a lover: blazon. A device often used in Elizabethan lyric poetry and parodied in Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 130'

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,

The speaker is calling the ladies 'coyness' a 'crime' - coyness being her reluctance to engage in sexual relations. Hyperbole. Coyness suggests desire which is hidden - speaker suggest she does want to engage despite her outward reluctance.

The 'I' alliteration of 'long love's' slows down the phrase, empathising the duration of this hypothetical relationship.

'Complaint' (or 'plaint') was a term used to a formerly a popular variety of poem that laments or protests unrequited love or tells of personal misfortune, misery, or injustice.

'Flood' refers to Noah's Arc. Biblical references show intellectuality and may be persuasive to a likely Christian woman

'Vegetable love' refers to his love as a slow-growing but deep-rooted vegetable. It also casts his love as natural. The speaker wants intimacy now because his love is ever growing. Could also be a *double entendre*, a reference to his penis.

Is the speaker intimating that the lady is being cruel, that right now, by refusing sexual relations, she is not showing her heart?

The speaker called her 'mistress' before, yet now calls her 'lady', another



The speaker tells his lady hyperbolic amounts of time such as “Two hundred to each breast” to emphasise how much time he would hypothetically devote to her if he could but then reinforces that he cannot - he is fulfilling what she wants through hypothetical hyperbole.

Volta here after the first stanza the tone switches abruptly - and almost disregards everything in the prior stanza. It is a switch to reality, in a reality in which we do not have time, and therefore this cannot happen.

While this seems contradictory as he has just said time is running out, eternity refers to the time beyond death, which seems sterile “Deserts”.

This could also paradoxically relate to the ‘vegetable love’ in stanza one: the idea of slow, dull and boring life, although likely refers to time beyond the grave.

Grotesque image of a worm invading her vagina. The mocking tone “Quaint Honour” the adjective “Quaint” is belittling and juxtaposes the idea of true honour. Also a *double entendre* - “quaint” was a euphemism for vagina in the late 16th century.

Beginning of third stanza the speaker changes tone once again into a shift back to reality. Repetition of “now” signals importance of acting promptly.

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

form of flattery or genuine increase in respect? The direct address ‘you’ and the verb “deserve” creates a very personal and intimate compliment

Speaker trying to convince his interlocutor that his love is not cheap - he doesn’t lavish it on whoever. Transactional language of rational argument

Reference to Greek mythology; Helios, the sun god, is commonly represented as driving a chariot drawn by four winged horses.

Personification of time which we also see in Sonnet 116.

Tries to scare his lady with references to her mortality. She will not be able to hear his ‘song’ from her vault. Fear-based tactics much different to stanza one which uses flattery to win her over.

‘Lust’ and ‘dust’ rhyming couplet alludes to an ultimatum between sex or death

The speaker creates the idea of perspiration here. “Instant fires” and “willing” suggests the person addressed is desirous of him

Sport a euphemism

The speaker wants the mistress to decide





'Ball' can refer to an erotic image of two bodies intertwined or can be interpreted as a cannonball thrown in a battle against time.

Sounds like rough sex

At the time of writing people believed that the sun controlled time and revolved around Earth, The triple alliteration "Sun Stand still" the 's' sound creates a powerful personification statement against the personification of time.

The plural pronoun "we" in the final rhyming couplet is significant - Marvell unites them. In addition, the certainty of "will" (rather than "may" or "let us") means the poem finishes on a triumphant note.

Alludes to metaphysical and 'carpe diem' themes combining philosophical aspects and intellect with urgency.

Then 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.

between acting like "amorous birds of prey" or "languish[ing] in his slow-chap't power". "Amorous birds of prey" is a contradiction - birds of prey are vicious. Time is again personified: "his... power"

The plural pronouns "us" and "our" pulls them together as a unit - before it was he pursuing her.

Exhorts his mistress to rushing headlong at the 'gates' barring them from full enjoyment of life. Breaking the 'iron gates' could also be a euphemism referring to breaking her hymen. Iron conveys the idea that they have been too tough to break through until now.





## Perspective

We don't learn much about either the speaker or the mistress. We know that the speaker is aiming to pursue his mistress and must be well travelled as he speaks of various lands. He also uses intellectual references and arguments throughout referring to **religious turmoil** "**Conversion of the Jews**" (line 10), the British conquest "**Indian Ganges**" (line 5), Greek mythology "**Time's winged chariot**" (line 22), and the history of literature and courtly lovers as he mocks their **hyperbolic extremes** through lines 13 to 20. Overall we get the impression the speaker must be highly educated. We know the poem is to seduce. The speaker attempts to persuade his mistress through flattery, hyperbolic praise, through fear and various other devices / tactics. However, we learn nothing of the pair's relationship.

## The Opening

Marvell begins by playing with the '**carpe diem**' theme. Through "**Had we but world enough and time**" (line 1), he immediately suggests the opposite: that they do not have enough time and must act quickly. Thus, he introduces the theme of lack of time quickly, so that she immediately realises the urgency of the situation. He then accuses her of "**coyness**" (line 2), thereby suggesting she is only feigning a lack of desire. He says that this coyness would be reasonable if they had time for it. He then elaborates on what would happen if they did indeed have time - with a list of events so long that its length **mirrors the imagined duration**.

The speaker begins talking of famous places in the world such as "**Indian Ganges**" (line 5) which had recently been discovered and conquered by the British. The speaker compares his mistress to the Ganges; this could mean that he feels she is beautiful, holy, and untouched due to her virginity, However this could also relate to the recent conquest of India he may be also be intimating that he **wants to conquer her** by taking her virginity. On the other hand, he refers to himself as "**by the tide Of Humber**" (line 7) which is much less glamorous in comparison. It appears he is almost **putting himself down in order to flatter her**. In this hypothetical situation, they are **geographically distant**, perhaps mirroring the distance that he currently seeks to overcome. It could also reflect how much variation there is in their views on sexual relations.

The speaker addresses the "**lady**" directly. This is **apostrophe**: one of the poem's key linguistic devices, a figure of speech where a speaker directly addresses an absent person. The tone of the first two lines is both teasing and stern which gives the impression that the speaker **knows the lady well** but **disapproves of her choices**.



The lady the speaker addresses is the same lady of the title: “**His Coy Mistress**”. The label “mistress” does not mean, within this contemporary context, a woman who has an affair with a married man. In Marvell’s day, it was a general term for a woman who held authority of some kind. So, the reader may consider what authority this woman has that the speaker addresses.

- This is difficult to answer because the speaker refrains from telling us much about her.
- The most we know is her “coyness” which implies a certain level of flirtatious behaviour but she refuses the speaker’s advances.

The first two lines are in rhyming **iambic tetrameter**. The first line introduces an idea which the second completes, binding them together. This pattern persists through the poem; the speaker’s thoughts fall often into two lines of rhyming couplets. The opening also establishes the set up of **syllogism**: a three-part logical argument in which the first 2 parts contribute to a final conclusion. The poem is structured in this way.

## Structure

### Rhyme scheme and Form

The poem has **three stanzas** of varying lengths, showing that there is no rigid structure or form to the poem. Marvell appears to have created a new style or form of poem here which **rebels against traditional 17th century styles of poem**. The poem also falls short of being in **Heroic verse**, a type of verse popular in the 17th century touching on themes such as epic battles. Heroic verse used rhyming **iambic pentameter** couplets, whereas Marvell almost deliberately misses a **foot** and follows the scheme of **rhyming tetrameter couplets**. It appears as though he is **mocking** heroic verse. Alternatively, it could be argued that the poem is mocking itself by using (nearly) heroic verse for a seduction poem, or even mocking the speaker’s **earnestness**. The iambic tetrameter creates a **lighter, looser and less serious tone** which appears much more punchy and fast-paced. This complements his “**carpe diem**” **argument**. The rhyme scheme follows **aabbccdd** throughout. This, together with the rhyming iambic tetrameter couplets giving it some structure and rhythm which mirrors the speaker’s intimidating intellect, yet leaves a **playful, loose tone**.

At points, the **closed couplet form breaks down**. For example, the line “**Now let us sport us while we may**” (line 37) is a complete clause in itself - it does not require the following line to complete it, as lines such as “**And while thy willing soul transpires**” (line 35) do. Its standalone nature is deliberate - it is the poem’s argument or **thesis statement** and thus Marvell wants it to stand out.



## Meter

The poem uses a pretty regular **iambic tetrameter**, although at crucial moments the pattern of stresses (4 feet of unstressed-stressed syllables) gets **disrupted**. For example, “**Now let us sport us while we may**” (line 37) has the stress on the first syllable, with the following two syllables unstressed, creating a **trochee**. This creates a sense of stumbling forward - while the speaker is urging movement, is urging them to thrust themselves through the “**iron gates of life**” (line 42).

## Language

### Personification

Marvell **personifies time** as an inexplicable power that has the capacity to control everything. This is explicitly shown in line 22 - “**Time’s winged chariot**” - where time is presented as a being seated in a chariot. “**Winged chariot**” has godlike connotations, suggesting time is untouchable and out of mortal reach. Later, Marvell suggests time is a person - “**his slow chap’t power**” (line 40) - who is enjoying his control. This personification creates a parallel between ‘To His Coy Mistress’ and ‘Sonnet 116’, which imagines time as a kind of grim reaper, possessing a sickle that slashes “**rosy cheeks and lips**”. Marvell characterises time as a rather stately and removed personage whereas Shakespeare’s image is quite horrifying. The speaker pits himself and his mistress against Time, whom they can successfully through the union of their bodies. However, the sense that time can be beaten only emerges in the third stanza; prior to this he describes the **gruesome effects of time and mortality**, in an attempt to frighten her into acquiescence.

### Hyperbole

**Hyperbole** is used throughout the poem in order to bolster the speaker’s argument. One example of this is line 27: “**Worms shall try that long preserved Virginity**”. The speaker is stating here that his mistress is so coy that time will run out before she can consent to giving away her virginity, and so the worms will be the ones to take it. In other words, her genitals eaten by worms, which the speaker compares to penetration.

- This is rather **derogatory** of the speaker - he suggests that if the woman does not take the opportunity presented by the speaker then she may never have the chance to lose her virginity.
- In some ways, he suggests he is her only option and this acts as part of his argument to persuade her to be accepting of his romantic advances.



This is hyperbolic language as it is unlikely that his mistress will preserve her virginity until she dies. It seems that the speaker is trying to **induce fear** in his mistress. Hyperbole is also present in the hypothetical situation of the first stanza: to suggest, even with unlimited time at his disposal, that he would spend thousands of years **extolling her beauty** is clear exaggeration.

### Alliteration

**Alliteration** is used in the poem to create emphasis. Marvell uses alliteration in the first stanza and returns to this in the last stanza. These two stanzas are linked in the way they focus on consummating desires. For example, in the first stanza we get the **repetition** of the 'w' sound through: **“world”, “we”, “would”, “way”, and “walk”** (lines 1-4). The 'w' sounds slow down pronunciation of the words, puts emphasising on their importance: the speaker unifies the two stanzas with “we” and his argument focuses on the shortness of life in the living “world”.

Other examples:

- **“long love’s day”** (line 4)
  - The repetition of “l” sounds elongates the phrase, thereby highlighting its length, which contrasts with their present situation, in which life is short.
- **“sun/ Stand still”** (lines 43-44). The **triple ‘s’** sounds here make the phrase appear harsh and stands out amongst everything else in the final stanza.

### Metaphor

Metaphor is used just twice in the poem. The first metaphor - **“To walk, and pass our long Love’s Day”** (line 4) - allows the speaker to comparing his and his mistress’ lives single day. This is **paradoxical** as the day he is describing is part of a situation in which they have infinite time. The second metaphor also appears in the first stanza: **“my vegetable love”**. Here the speaker is suggesting his love is slow-growing but deep rooted, like a root vegetable. The metaphor also suggests his love is **natural**. Finally, we can also interpret it as a *double entendre* - a reference to his penis. The slowness that this image suggests sounds **stupefying**, which may convince the mistress to engage in sexual relations soon.

### Antithesis

Marvell also uses a device that is rarely seen in metaphysical poetry, but is more commonly used by later poets: antithesis. Antithesis can be summarised by ‘not X but Y’. The final couplet uses antithesis: **“though we cannot make our sun/ Stand still, yet we will make him run”** (lines 45-46).



## The Heart

The speaker uses the symbol of the **“heart”** in line 18. Before this line, the speaker focuses on his mistress’ aesthetic characteristics, such as the **“forehead”**, **“eyes”**, **“breasts”**

The heart he turns to symbolises her innermost character. The speaker insists that in a utopian world, the mistress could delay the revealing of her self until the very end of time. Though the speaker is in love, he suggests that he does not wish for her reciprocation until she is ready. He tries to convince her that he would be **satisfied with a non-physical relationship**: **“you should, if you please, refuse [sexual relations]/ Till the conversion of the Jews”** (lines 9-10). Sex is not necessary to their hypothetical relationship; her heart is the **true prize** - the speaker supposedly wants love. By withholding his sexual desire here and foregrounding the importance of the heart / non-physical intimacy, the speaker may be **trying to allay his mistress’ fears** that he will abandon her once he has slept with her.

## Themes

### Love and Loss

- The speaker seems to live in fear of missing out on sexual opportunities. In order to avoid this, he tries to instil in his mistress a fear of death and of the **“hurrying”** (line 11) passage of time.
- He presents his love as secure and deep-rooted (**“vegetable love”**, line 22). While he argues it could last thousands of years, it is **threatened by mortality**: **“The grave’s a fine and private place,/ But none, I think, do there embrace”** (lines 31-32).
- Time also promises the loss of beauty: In **“deserts of vast eternity/ Thy beauty shall no more be found”** (lines 24-25). The speaker compares death to **“deserts of vast eternity”**. In Christianity, the desert is often thought of as a space of trial and tribulation (see, for example, Jesus going into the desert to prepare for death). The desert is seen also a space which gives its wanderers spiritual clarity and cleanse them of sins. Marvell’s speaker rejects these Christian associations and instead links the desert to death and time, suggesting that death is a barren land with nothing in it, an empty space.
  - o The speaker suggests, therefore, against Christian morals, that life after death is nothingness. This suits the speaker because he **wants to emphasise the loss the mistress will experience** if she continues to



- reject his advances.
- The image reveals the speaker's **nihilistic beliefs** and his rejection of Christianity.

### Love and Sex

The speaker is interested in the woman for the purpose of sex. References to sex and genitalia in the poem are **veiled** and often take the form of **euphemism** or **double entendre**, due to the restrictions of the day. Sex as generally taboo in the 17th century, and extra-marital sex was seen as wrong, thus Marvell has to be doubly careful that the speaker's desires are not too **overt**.

As with many other poems in the anthology, it is important to consider the relationship between sexual desire and love. The speaker seems to want to convince his mistress of the solid nature of his love, perhaps **to allay his mistress' fears** that he will abandon her once he has slept with her. He hyperbolically states that it has huge potential - can grow "**vaster than empires**" (line 11) - and last millennia. Nevertheless, he seems most interested in the potential interaction of their bodies (which seems more playful than loving: "**amorous birds of prey**" (line 38)) and so we the reader may well be **doubtful of the sincerity of his feelings** for her.

### Love and Death

The entirety of the poem has a **strong sense of urgency** to seduce his mistress, reflected in the fast-paced iambic tetrameter. According to the speaker, time is running out. At the beginning of the poem his tone is **mild** "**We would sit down**" (line 3). He uses an abundance of **modal verbs** in the first stanza ("**Shouldst**" "**Should**" "**Would**") to express what they would do if they had time. This first stanza is the longest of the three, which emphasises how much time they have in this hypothetical situation.

As the poem progresses the pace speeds up drastically specifically and the images become more **dramatic** and **grotesque**. While the meter stays the same, the second stanza is much more polysyllabic - for example, "**virginity**" "**echoing**" "**chariot**" "**hurrying**", which speeds up the pace to reflect the urgency of the present-day situation.

The last stanza is the speaker's proposition, full of powerful verbs such as "devour" and "tear". The tenses become more powerful: they move from the conditional ("**Shouldst**" "**Should**" "**Would**") of the first stanza into the first-person plural imperative "**Let us**" (lines 37, 41) and the assured future tense "**We will**" (line 46). The poem ends on a **triumphant note**; the speaker is confident that together they can **challenge death** with



their lovemaking.

While the speaker makes it clear in the first stanza that he **would like to demonstrate courtly, traditional love** (aided by the royal image of “**rubies**” (line 6)), this demonstration of love is time consuming and they have little time. He attempts to convince her that they can defeat time and death by **consummating their desire** for each other and ultimately leverages the theme of death to fulfil his sexual desires.

## Comparisons

### ‘To His Coy Mistress’ - ‘The Flea’

Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both seduction poems</li> <li>• Both use grotesque imagery as part of their seduction “<b>purpled thy nail in blood of innocence</b>” and “<b>worms shall try that long preserved virginity</b>”</li> <li>• Written in very similar times (early 17th century)</li> <li>• Similar language and techniques such as the use of hyperbole and melodramatic language to create an argument which is strong and structured</li> <li>• Both use <b>abstract ideas</b> and <b>metaphysical concerns</b> to further their argument</li> <li>• Both display <b>wit and erudition: logic and esoteric references</b>.</li> <li>• Both accuse their ladies of cruelty: Marvell’s speaker intimates that his mistress is slow to “<b>show [her] heart</b>” and is committing a “<b>crime</b>” by refusing sexual relations, while Donne directly accuses his mistress of being cruel.</li> </ul>
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Donne was a metaphysical poet, whereas Marvell was a satirical poet who wrote in the ‘carpe diem’ style</li> <li>• Donne stuck to <b>one specific conceit</b> throughout and Marvell interspersed conceits but covered varying areas.</li> <li>• Marvell’s speaker shows <b>appreciation for his mistress’ body</b> whereas Donne does not.</li> <li>• While they are both seduction poems, <b>Donne speaker’s intentions are more overt</b>; he wants to share a “<b>marriage bed</b>” without being married. Marvell uses grander language and stately metaphors such as “<b>winged chariot</b>” but is <b>more coded</b> “<b>roll up into one ball</b>”</li> <li>• We learn more about Donne’s speaker’s relationship: they are “<b>almost, nay more than married are</b>” and their parents “<b>grudge</b>” their relationship. In contrast, we can only infer from Marvell’s speaker’s playful tone that he and his mistress are familiar.</li> </ul>



## 'To His Coy Mistress' - 'Whoso List to Hunt'

<p>Similarities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both poems portray an <b>attempt to conquer somebody</b>; 'To a Coy Mistress' is the attempt itself, whereas 'Whoso List to Hunt' retells an unsuccessful attempt.</li> <li>• There are <b>barriers to love</b> in both poems: in 'To a Coy Mistress' there is the threat of time running out, while the woman/ deer in 'Whoso List to Hunt' is already owned by another man. Both women resist their advances.</li> <li>• <b>Control and structure</b> present in both: Wyatt uses a Petrarchan sonnet form with a confused metre while Marvell doesn't use any particular form but does use regular iambic tetrameter.</li> </ul>
<p>Differences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both seem to be seduction poems but there are more <b>euphemisms / double entendres</b> in 'To a Coy Mistress' that make it clear that the speaker wants to have sex. Wyatt's speaker probably wants to have sex - the metaphor of a hunt makes it likely - but he might have also wanted to be in a relationship with the woman.</li> <li>• 'To a Coy Mistress' is more <b>playful</b> and ends on a <b>confident, triumphant</b> note, whereas 'Whoso List to Hunt' is the <b>lament of a disappointed suitor</b>.</li> <li>• The speaker in 'To a Coy Mistress' addresses an absent speaker (apostrophe) but he <b>addresses her directly</b> "lady" "if you please". 'Whoso List to Hunt's' speaker addresses anyone interested in potentially 'hunting'</li> <li>• Marvell's poem is more <b>wide-ranging</b> and <b>intellectual</b>.</li> </ul>

