***To his Coy Mistress***

by Andrew Marvell

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.   
  
**Context**

Andrew Marvell is often described as being a metaphysical poet (using images and word play to express complex ideas and feelings) as so much of his poetry deals with ideas of existence and truth. His poetry is also humorous, often using satire to attack or mock others.

His poems are often centred on wealthier people, that is, those at court - high up enough in society to be around the monarch and those in power.

**Structure and language**

**Structure**

The poem has three sections. In the first *stanza* the ideal courtship is presented, with extravagant references to the care and devotion with which the speaker would "woo" his lover "had we but time". The second stanza makes it clear that they have not got time, and that death is not only inevitable but imminent. The final stanza proposes that they fight against the progression of time and seek pleasure while they are able.

The poem is written in *rhyming couplets*, a popular format in rhyming poetry.

**Language**

In the first stanza there are humorously exaggerated references to traditional romantic ideas. He speaks of spending "An hundred years" to "praise/Thine eyes" and "Two hundred to adore each breast". This is all undermined by the poem's opening words: "Had we but world enough, and time". He is presenting a courtship which may sound wonderful, but is one he states from the outset is impossible. Persuasively he tells his lover "you deserve this state", even though he knows it is all an exaggerated fantasy.

Images of death and decay are used in the second stanza to show the lover the pointlessness of resisting. Once dead "then worms shall try/That long preserved virginity". …

The second stanza also echoes words from the Christian burial tradition: "dust" and "ashes" are both referred to and act as a reminder to the mistress that life only has one outcome, so waiting is pointless. The rhyming of "dust" and "lust" on lines 29 and 30 effectively summarises the choice the mistress must make.

The final line of the second stanza uses parenthetical commas (commas used to enclose thoughts) to convince us (and the lover), that the speaker has logically reached a conclusion: "The grave's a fine and private place,/But none, I think, do there embrace". This acts as a challenge; who would be unreasonable enough to disagree with him?

The final stanza, in which the speaker grows impatient to convince his mistress, is full of references to speed, urgency and passion. The simile "while the youthful hue/Sits on thy skin like morning dew" restates the speaker's desire, with a focus on his mistress' body. The "morning dew" is also an effective simile in that dew very quickly disappears as the day advances, like her youthful appearance. He suggests that "like amorous birds of prey" they should "at once our time devour". This imagery is quite animalistic, and hints at his barely-contained desires. They should not, he thinks, be waiting for death. He speaks of "instant fires", meaning their feelings of desire, urging his mistress that they should "sport us while we may".

They should, he suggests "roll all our strength and all/Our sweetness up into one ball". The alliteration of the 's' sounds on the positive words "strength" and "sweetness" are part of a shift in the poem away from the negative language of earlier to more active, more enjoyable words and ideas.

The poem evidently belongs to the metaphysical movement as reflected in farfetched imagery and neoclassic elements. The most striking images is for example “the vegetable of my love” or “birds of prey” while the neoclassic is the biblical references to “the flood” and “the conversion of the Jews.”

**THE FLEA**  
by John Donne

MARK but this flea, and mark in this,  
How little that which thou deniest me is ;  
It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,   
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be.  
Thou know'st that this cannot be said  
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead ;  
Yet this enjoys before it woo,  
And pamper'd swells with one blood made of two ;  
And this, alas ! is more than we would do.  
  
O stay, three lives in one flea spare,  
Where we almost, yea, more than married are.  
This flea is you and I, and this  
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is.  
Though parents grudge, and you, we're met,  
And cloister'd in these living walls of jet.  
Though use make you apt to kill me,  
Let not to that self-murder added be,  
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.  
  
Cruel and sudden, hast thou since  
Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence?  
Wherein could this flea guilty be,  
Except in that drop which it suck'd from thee?  
Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou  
Find'st not thyself nor me the weaker now.  
'Tis true ; then learn how false fears be ;  
Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,  
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

**Summary**

The speaker tells his beloved to look at the flea before them and to note “how little” is that thing that she denies him. For the flea, he says, has sucked first his blood, then her blood, so that now, inside the flea, they are mingled; and that mingling cannot be called “sin, or shame, or loss of maidenhead.” The flea has joined them together in a way that, “alas, is more than we would do.”

As his beloved moves to kill the flea, the speaker stays her hand, asking her to spare the three lives in the flea: his life, her life, and the flea’s own life. In the flea, he says, where their blood is mingled, they are almost married—no, more than married—and the flea is their marriage bed and marriage temple mixed into one. Though their parents grudge their romance and though she will not make love to him, they are nevertheless united and cloistered in the living walls of the flea. She is apt to kill him, he says, but he asks that she not kill herself by killing the flea that contains her blood; he says that to kill the flea would be sacrilege, “three sins in killing three.”

“Cruel and sudden,” the speaker calls his lover, who has now killed the flea, “purpling” her fingernail with the “blood of innocence.” The speaker asks his lover what the flea’s sin was, other than having sucked from each of them a drop of blood. He says that his lover replies that neither of them is less noble for having killed the flea. It is true, he says, and it is this very fact that proves that her fears are false: If she were to (“yield to me”), she would lose no more honor than she lost when she killed the flea.

**Form**

The rhyme scheme in each stanza is similarly regular, in couplets, with the final line rhyming with the final couplet: AABBCCDDD.

**Commentary**

This funny little poem again exhibits Donne’s metaphysical love-poem mode, his aptitude for turning even the least likely images into elaborate symbols of love and romance. This poem uses the image of a flea that has just bitten the speaker and his beloved to sketch an amusing conflict over whether the two will engage in an affair. The speaker wants to, the beloved does not, and so the speaker, highly clever but grasping at straws, uses the flea, in whose body his blood mingles with his beloved’s, to show how innocuous such mingling can be—he reasons that if mingling in the flea is so innocuous, then their gathering would be the same for they are really the same thing. By the second stanza, the speaker is trying to save the flea’s life, holding it up as “our marriage bed and marriage temple.”

But when the beloved kills the flea despite the speaker’s protestations (and probably as a deliberate move to squash his argument, as well), he turns his argument on its head and claims that despite the high-minded and sacred ideals he has just been invoking, killing the flea did not really impugn his beloved’s honor—and despite the high-minded and sacred ideals she has invoked in refusing to sleep with him, doing so would not impugn her honor either.

**Both “To his Coy Mistress” and “The Flea” are considered a representation of Carpe Diem: Seize the Day.**