

To His Coy Mistress¹

by Andrew Marvell (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 Humber² would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.³
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 love song; then worms shall try
That long preserved virginity,
And your quaint honor 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
Than languish in his slow-chapped⁴ power.
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough⁵ the iron gates of life:
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run,

¹The word “mistress” did not have the modern implications of adultery in Marvell's century. Instead, it meant roughly the same thing as the modern term “girlfriend.”

²The river flowing by the town of Hull, where Marvell lived.

³The end of time. 17th century Christians believed that the world would end shortly after all the Jews in the world accepted Christianity.

⁴Slow-jawed, slowly devouring.

⁵Through