The poem is an elaborate act to persuade a woman to sleep with a man. She does not wish to do so, and the speaker has to persuade her.

**To His Coy Mistress**

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 Humber would complain.

Of Humber would I 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
Connotations of speed and rush + "time" & "hurrying" =

"time flies" & sets the darker tone of the 2nd section of the poem

Lines 27-29: Worms will take her of her virginity when she is dead, then she will decompose (*"turn to dust")

She doesn't want to sleep with him, thus the poet describes her as "coy": hesitant, modest.

**Lines 1-20:** His wish for their relationship to be a certain way ("would").

Uses emotive language of flattery in the 1st section to persuade her to sleep with him & also strong arguments & irresistible logic to convince her of the folly of postponing their physical pleasure.

Image: Vegetables (like love) are nourishing. Both his love & the vegetable would grow slowly and spread over centuries until they become enormous and cover huge areas.

**Contrasting point of view – different point of view.**

Theme of time: the speaker deals with huge tracks of time – centuries, ages, epochs.

Uses equally emotive horrors of death & decay in the 2nd section & also strong arguments & irresistible logic to convince her of the folly of postponing their physical pleasure.

Hyperbole: He would love her ten years before great flood (Gen. 5:8-10;32) & would still love her until all Jews became Christians at the end of the world.

Metaphor: compares love to a vegetative growth, which is slow and unconscious.

Hyperbole: 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;
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Thy beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
Connotations of speed and rush + "time" & "hurrying" = image of rapid movement.

Lines 27-29: Worms will take her of her virginity when she is dead, then she will decompose (*"turn to dust")
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 glew*,
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-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.

*glew - glow
*slow-chapped - slow
*thorough – through

Sees her verginity as endearing.

Paradox: The poet, starts by saying they have all the time in the world & ends in the fact that they don't.

No "embracing" in this area (death).

A strong line of argument has led to this point.

The woman secretly really wants to sleep with him: she has a "willing soul" - representing her real desires - which has "instant fires" of lust.

Metaphor: lovers soul (desires) breathers through her body with heat ("instant fires").

Paradox (lines 39-40): The speaker wants to get rid of time, but needs time in order to enjoy life (to have sex).

Personification: Image of the sun wearing running shoes and running away from the speaker.

Metaphor: The restrictions & expectations from society to be a certain way.

Metaphor: They cannot stop the passing of the time.

Personification: Image of the sun wearing running shoes and running away from the speaker.

Paradox: a contradiction in terms; words with an implication that is opposite to their meaning.

Allusion: Reference to a statement, person, place, event or thing that is known from literature, history, religion, mythology, plots, sports, science, or popular culture.

Hyperbole: An outrageous exaggeration used for effect.
**What is the poem about?**

**What is the subject of the poem?**
- The poem is an elaborate act to persuade a woman to sleep with a man. She does not wish to do so, and the speaker has to persuade her.

**Who is speaking?**
- 1st person narrator “I” – a man.

**What is the location/setting of the poem?**
- We imagine our own setting and the speaker imagines his setting.

**Themes and messages of the poem:**
- **Time:** the speaker deals with huge tracks of time – centuries, ages, epochs. He sees time as a super-villain out to get him. It’s not surprising that Marvell was concerned with time. It was a hot topic in the 1600’s.
- **Sex:** If time is the super-villain, then having sex is the super-power he needs to gain control over his enemy. With wit and daring, the speaker discusses sex in frank, beautiful, and disturbing language.
- **Mortality:** Mortality, otherwise known as “death,” gets a whole stanza. The speaker presents his vision of the afterlife. He thinks that dying is the ultimate lack of control.
- **Freedom and Confinement:** “To His Coy Mistress” is constantly on the move between images of freedom and images of imprisonment. As we read why the speaker feels trapped, and how he thinks he can get out, we feel the need to examine the freedoms and confinements of our own lives. The poem can feel claustrophobic at some moments, but, at other moments, we feel all our confines crumble.
- **Carpe diem:** seize the day; as time is passing rapidly, and will never return, we should take every opportunity that presents itself to us.

**Attitudes and feelings in the poem:**

**Emotions and feelings of the speaker:**
- In the 1st stanza the speaker is being romantic, intimate, seductive and passionate towards his Love. He is desiring her. In the 2nd stanza he is witty, urgent, contemplating and morbid. In the 3rd stanza he is passionate, almost violent.

**Tone of the poem:**
- The tone goes through transitions throughout the poem. It begins romantic, intimate, passionate, seductive and tranquil in the 1st stanza. The tone shifts to witty, urgency, contemplating (thinking about) and morbid feelings in the 2nd stanza. The tone in the 3rd stanza is passionate, almost violent, and
lacking the romantic tone the speaker began with in stanza 1.

**Form and structure of the poem (rhyme, rhythm, line length, stanza length, etc.):**

**Rhyming scheme:**
- Heroic couplets: aabbccddeeffghhiijj; etc.
- Each line rhymes with the one that follows it. Where the lines rhyme in pairs, is called **heroic couplet**.
- Effect of each line rhyming with the next one: The rhymes **emphasise or strengthen certain words**.
- Words that rhyme are **brought closer** to each other in order to bring their **connection** to the reader’s attention.

**Language of the poem:**
- The poem does not use modern English because of words such as “shouldst”, “thine”, “yonder” and “thy”.
- A **modern lover** would not call his beloved “Lady”, as the speaker does in this poem (line 2).
- “An hundred years”, this expression is longer used.
- “Thorough” which means “through” in line 44. We use it today to mean “careful” or “extensive”.

**Layout of the poem:**
- The words of the sentence do not go all the way to the right-hand margin of the page as they do when writing prose (**prose**: words that extend from the left to the right margin and then continue on the next line).

- The poem is divided into **three sections**: lines 1-20; lines 21-32; and lines 33-46:

- **1st section**: Describe a certain way for the speaker to love his mistress (or girlfriend). He is imagining how things “would” be if he had his way.

- **Characteristics of the kind of love in the 1st section**: Detailed, respectful, slow, adoring & gradual (progressing slowly).

- **2nd section**: The speaker immediately turns to his mistress’s body (her eyes, her forehead and her breasts). He says he wants to appreciate & enjoy each of them for a long period of time – a hundred years, two hundred years, or thirty thousand years (lines 13-16). The speaker introduces a contrasting point of view. The word “but” tells us this.

**Three things about the speaker & his poem:**
- (1) The poet is concerned about bodily, corporeal & sexual matters.
The poet is not writing about reality or anything that would take place. The theme of time is important & the speaker is dealing with huge tracts of time – centuries, ages, epochs.

**3rd section:** The speaker is asking his beloved to make love with him. The whole poem is an elaborate act of persuading a woman to sleep with a man. She does not wish to do so and the speaker has to persuade her.

**Presentation of a logical argument, or syllogism:**

1. We could spend decades or even centuries in courtship if time stood still and we remained young.
2. But time passes swiftly and relentlessly.
3. Therefore, we must enjoy the pleasure of each other now, without further ado.

   - The conclusion of the argument begins at line 33 with "Now therefore."
   - The three sections of the poem are carefully designed to persuade the woman to give in to the man's suit, and make love with him.

**Type of poem:**

- Fixed heroic form.

**Poetic devices (e.g. metaphors, similes, enjambment, alliteration, personification, etc.):**

- Explained in the poem above.

**Personal response to the poem (how do I feel, what impact does the poem have on me):**

- YOUR PERSONAL RESPONSE!
Questions from knowledge4africa:

**Had we but world enough, and time,**
**This coyness, Lady, were no crime**

Supply ONE word for “Had we but world enough, and time”.

- Eternity

What does the poet mean by “coyness”?

- The poet is referring to a certain shyness, reserve or unwillingness on the part of the woman to start participating in sexual intercourse.

Why does the poet refer to the “coyness” as “no crime”? When will it be a crime?

- The poet refers to the crime of wasting so much beauty – beautiful face, wonderful breasts, delightful body – by not using it for its essential purpose which is passionate sexual intercourse.
- If one had all eternity, he says, it would not be a crime but, because time is short and the beauty of the body will quickly fade, then it is indeed a crime not to have sexual intercourse right now.

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 Huber would complain.

Comment on the poet’s reference to the Ganges and the Humber.

- These are two rivers, one in India (Ganges) and the other in England (the Humber).
- In Marvell’s day, these rivers would have been regarded at opposite ends of the world.

What does the poet mean by “Shouldst rubies find”.

- England in the mid-17th century was in the middle of a massive expansion into the world, looking for new colonies and in search of new wealth.

Comment on the poet’s choice of words when he writes, “We would sit down, and think which way/To walk, and pass our long love’s day.”

- The poet uses words which indicate a slow, leisurely love-making – words like “sit down” and “think” and “walk”. These words are contrasting what he really wants, and that is not leisurely
love-making at all, but a frantic and very heated sexual intercourse with his lady.

I would
Love you ten years before the Flood;
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.

Explain the expressions “ten years before the Flood” and “Till the conversion of the Jews”.

- The story of Noah’s Flood is found towards the beginning of the Book of Genesis (Gen. 5:8-10; 32) which is the very first book of The Bible.
- The conversion of the Jews, on the other hand, occurs in the Book of Revelations which is the very last Book of the Christian New Testament – and according to the book, the conversion would occur at the Battle of the Armageddon at the end of time.
- The poet is referring to an idyllic love that would last forever – from the beginning of time till the very end.
- With so much time on hand, the poet and his lady would have all eternity in which to be shy or coy. But, he argues, they just don’t have that sort of time available to them, so they should be getting on with it.

My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow;

What does the poet mean by “vegetable love”?

- Image: Vegetables (like love) are nourishing.
- Both his love & the vegetable would grow slowly and spread over centuries until they become enormous and cover huge areas.
- Remember that, in Marvell’s time Great Britain was busy carving herself an empire in the world.

For, Lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.

Show how these words pay due honour to the lady’s social environment and to the accepted etiquette to which she is supposed to adhere.

- The poet doesn’t begin his discourse by informing his lady that her coyness is wrong. On the contrary, he tells her that he understands it, that she deserves to be treated with total respect.
If all else were equal, he would allow her to play coy for as long as she desires and he would not reject her or even attempt to force her to move any faster. He is willing to be a gentlemen.

Show how, as the poet moves into his “seize the moment” argument, his choice of words has dramatically changed from those of the previous stanza/section.

- In stanza/section 1 the poet has stressed a leisurely romance – with words like “sit”, “think” and “walk”. In the 2nd stanza/section he speaks of urgency and refers to “Time’s winged chariot” speeding along behind them, forever catching them.
- In the 1st stanza/section he spoke of rivers and forests. In the 2nd stanza/section he refers to “Deserts of vast eternity”. The lush, productive age of her female beauty is with her for just a very short time and therefore follows an eternal desert where there will be no beauty to admire or use.

Why is “Time” personified?

- The poet refers to the common perception of Time being an old man – the Grim Reaper (Death) – who comes along with his scythe to bring in the harvest of the dead.

But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.