

# *To His Coy Mistress*

*Andrew Marvell*





# Introduction

- The theme - “carpe diem.”



# Carpe Diem




1. lines 1, 21, and 33.

IF we had world enough and time, I could court you forever. BUT we do not. THEREFORE we should make love now, before it is too late.

“Carpe diem” - “seize the day.”

# Argument: carpe diem

- "seize the day" --
  - a very common literary motif in poetry
  - emphasises that **life is short and time is fleeting**
  - 
  - the speaker attempts to entice his listener, a young **lady usually described as a virgin.**

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- Five light blue circles are arranged horizontally at the top of the slide. The second circle from the left is an outline, while the others are solid. The text below is partially overlaid by these circles.
- This is a **seducing poem**.
  - The speaker uses a lot of exaggerated and **abstract words** to describe his love
  - he also told the mistress that time flies and asked her to **enjoy life quickly**.

A decorative header consisting of five circles in a row. From left to right: a solid light blue circle, an outlined light blue circle, a solid light blue circle, an outlined light blue circle, and a solid light blue circle.

- the speaker tells the mistress-

- **humans are mortal** so they should do something meaningful in their life

- or **they will have to regret.**

There was a man falling in love with his  
mistress.

He wanted to make love to her, but the  
mistress was shy and turned him down.

The speaker wrote the poem to the mistress  
in order to persuade her to accept him.



# Vocabulary

- 1. **Coy** - A coy person is shy, or pretends to be shy, about love and sex. (The mistress)
- 2. **Conversion** - Someone changes his religion or beliefs. (Conversion of Jews)
- 
- 
- 4. **Chariot** - fast-moving vehicles with two wheels that are pulled by horses (Time)

- **5. Eternity** - Eternity is time without an end or a state of existence outside time
- 
- **6. Quaint** - Something that is quaint is attractive because it is unusual and rather old-fashioned. (The honor of virginity)
- 
- **7. Vault**- A vault is a room underneath a church where people are buried, usually the members of a single family.
-

- **8. Lust** - Lust is a feeling of strong sexual desire for someone.
- 
- **9. Hue** - color
- 
- **10. Dew** - Dew is small drops of water that form on the ground and the other surfaces outdoors during the light. (The mistress's skin)
- 
- **11. Transpire** - (of plants) give off (water vapor) from the surface of leaves.
- 
- **12. Pore** - Pores are the tiny holes in humans' skin.
-

- **13. Amorous** (am'rous, line38) - readily showing or feeling love; relating to love, especially sexual love) (wild and passionate love)
- 
- **14. Prey** - animals or birds hunted and killed by another for food
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- **15. Languish** - be or become weak and miserable because of unfulfilled longings
- **16. Strife** - violence of making love

**Speaker :**

**An adorer of the mistress**

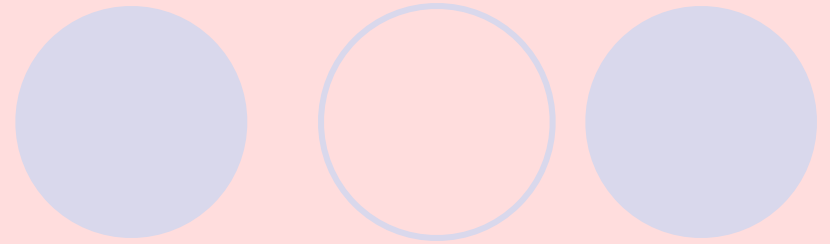
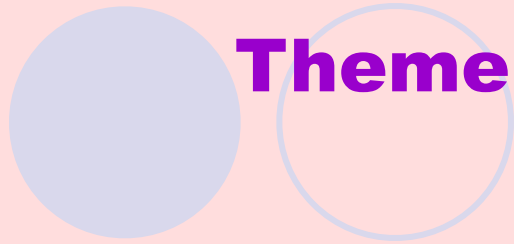
**Listener :**

**The mistress**



## Theme

- *Carpe diem* = **seize the day and have fun.**
- The speaker shows his strong passion for the mistress
- tries very hard to persuade her to make love to him.



- Because – no time - time will not wait for anyone -
- he asks her to “seize the day and have fun”, or she will regret when she is dead.

- **1st. Stanza:** The speaker told the mistress **how much he loved her.**



- *1. I would love you ten years before the Flood.* (Line 7~8)

- It is very early in the history







2. An hundred years should go to praise.....Two

hundred to adore each breast:

But thirty thousand to the rest.....( Line13~16)

.



→ The speaker uses the words, such as

“an hundred years,”

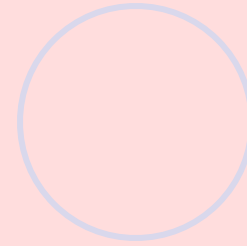
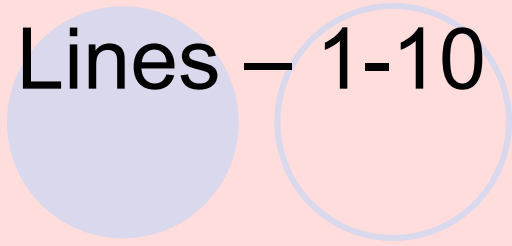
“two hundred years,”

and “thirty thousand years”

to describe his deep and lasting love

toward the mistress.


1. Lines – 1-10



2. Ganges and the Humber (The Humber is a large tidal estuary on the east coast of Northern England.)

3. The two rivers are far apart geographically, thus representing a great or infinite amount of space.

- River Ganges is in India, and Humber is in England.
- There is a long distance between the speaker (Humber) and the mistress (Indian Ganges)
- but the long distance doesn't affect his love toward the mistress.

- 
1. “ten years before the flood” and “the conversion of the Jews”
  2. The two events are **far apart chronologically**, thus **representing a great or infinite amount of time**.
  3. examples of hyperbole

Lines 11-20

“vegetable love”?

One possible meaning - concept of the **Great Chain of Being**.

Even into the Renaissance people believed in a fixed order of creation, a divinely ordained hierarchy known as the Great Chain of Being.

# Great Chain of Being



- **God** (perfect reason and understanding)
- **Angels** (reason and understanding)
- **Man** (reason, emotion, sensation, existence)
  - **Woman** (emotion, limited reason, sensation, existence)
- **Animal kingdom** (emotion, sensation, and existence)
- **Vegetable kingdom** (sensation and existence)
- **Stones and inanimate** objects (existence)

# Vegetable Love

The title 'Vegetable Love' is positioned at the top left. To its right, there are three circles: a solid light blue circle, an outlined light blue circle, and another solid light blue circle. The word 'Vegetable' is partially overlaid by the first solid circle and the first outlined circle.

1. Vegetative, fecund
2. Love at the **level of sensation** rather than reason and emotion, which should characterise human love.



# Catalogue of Beauty



“An hundred years should go to praise /  
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze”

connotations of **eyes** and **forehead**?

# Catalogue of Beauty



- Eyes = window of the soul
- Forehead = intellect
- In another example of hyperbole, the speaker tells his mistress **how much he appreciates her intellect.**
-

# Catalogue of Beauty

- “Two hundred to adore each breast, / But thirty thousand to the rest;”
- Think about this:
  - Eyes/forehead/intellect = 100 years
  - EACH breast = 200 years
  - “The rest” = 30,000 years

Where does his interest in her REALLY lie?



2nd. Stanza:

The speaker **threatens the mistress** if she does not seize the day to have fun, **she will regret when she dies** because time flies.



Ex:

1. *But at my back I always hear*  
*time's winged chariot* *hurrying*

*near...*( Line21~22)

→ Time waits for no men.

2. Thy beauty shall no more be  
found, nor in thy marble vault  
shall sound my echoing songs; then  
worms shall try that long preserved  
virginity, and your quaint honor  
turn to dust.....

( Line 25~29)



→ The speaker tells the mistress

she should cherish time or once the mistress

is dead

there will be only worms to admire her

virginity.

1. “time’s winged chariot” an allusion to classical figure

Phoebus Apollo, god of the sun, drove his chariot across the heavens each day.

words like “deserts,” “marble vault,” “dust,” and “ashes” suggest – **The dry, dead imagery**



“worms shall try / That long-preserved virginity”?



The contrast between his physical possession of her body

and the worms' physical possession

Which one is good?

his taking of her virginity seem more attractive.



“worms shall try / That long-preserved virginity”?

This section focuses on waste and loss, and these lines focus on the waste of her (dead virginal) body.

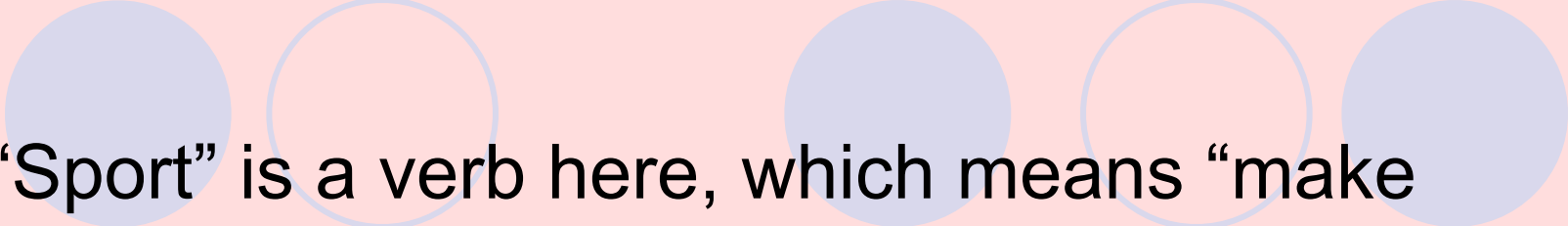
In short, he’s asking, “Whom would you rather have touching your body, me or the worms?”

- “The grave’s a fine and private place/ But none, I think, do there embrace.”

Do dead people embrace? Of course not.

**3rd. Stanza:** The speaker convinces the mistress to  
make love to him.

*Now let us sport us while we may; and  
now, like am'rous birds of prey. ( Line37~38)*



→ “Sport” is a verb here, which means “make love.”

The speaker convinces the mistress

she should not repress her feeling

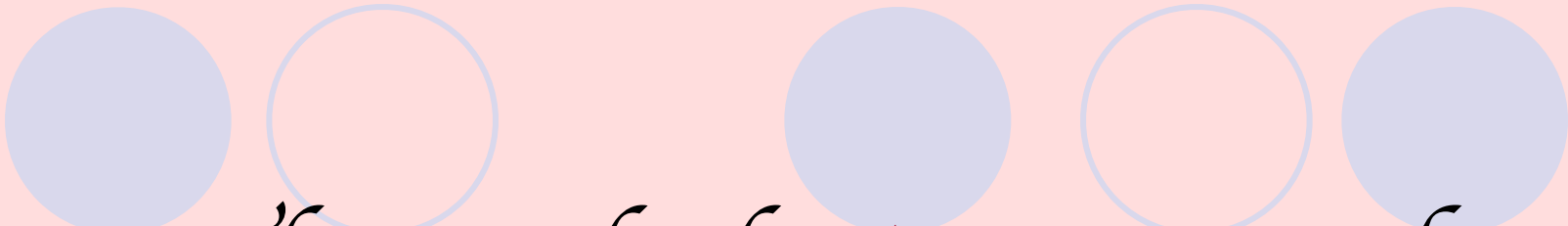
and should make love to him.

2. *Let us roll all our strength, and  
all our sweetness, up into one ball.*

(Line 41~42)

→ “Ball” means “making love.”

Let us make love so that our soul and body  
will combine.



3. .... *Thorough the iron gates of  
life.....* (Line 44)

→ If we make love, we are not afraid of  
“death.”

Here, “iron gates” represent “death.”

4. Thus, though we cannot make our sun stand still, yet we will make him run. ( Line 45~46)

→ This sentence has 2 meanings.

One is that our passion toward each other will melt

The other is we can speed up the time, and do something meaningful.



# Lines 33-46

1. From the **infinite time mentioned** in the first section
2. the poem has moved on to an **insistence on immediate action.**
3. “Now”

2. How is the imagery in these lines different from that in the previous section?

Note the words:

“morning dew”;

“youthful hue”;

“transpires”;

“instant fires.”

“Transpires” suggests a kind of breathing through the skin;

the “morning dew” is moist and evanescent, not lasting until midday;

“instant fires” suggests heat;

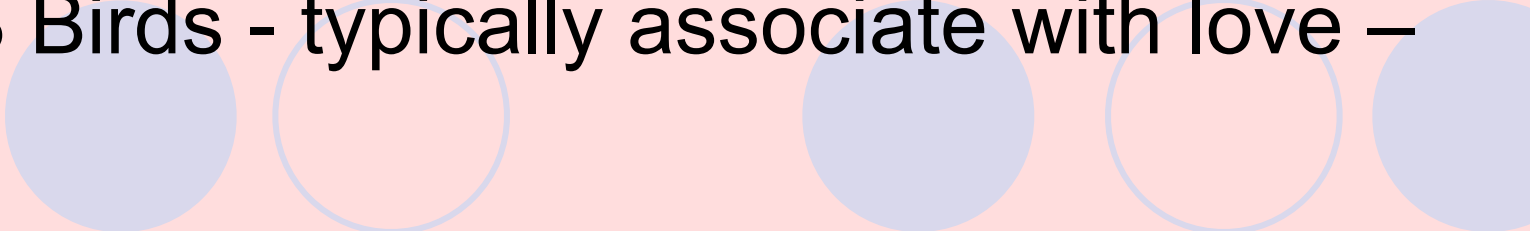
and “youthful hue” again emphasizes her skin.

2. Note the words: “morning dew”; “youthful hue”;  
“transpires”; “instant fires.”

The images suggest that **youth is warm, moist—  
and transitory.**

Previous section: dry and cold; -**death**

This section: warm and moist; - **life**

- 
- 3 Birds - typically associate with love –
  - Most people would say doves or another such gentle bird.
  - These lovers are “amorous birds of prey,” tearing at each other physically and devouring time.

- The poem is combined with “time” and “space”.

- **The first stanza:**

- 1. *Had we but world enough, and time*

- ↘  
space

- 2. *Thou by the Indian Ganges*

- : ↘ space

- *Of Humber would complain. I would*

-

## The second stanza:

\* *But at my back I always hear  
Times winged chariot hurrying near;*

↘  
Time

⋮  
⋮

Deserts of vast eternity.

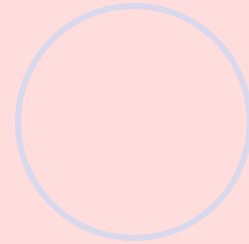
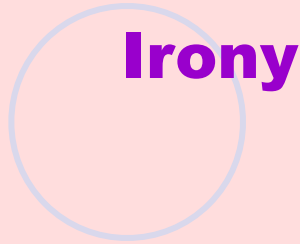
↘  
Space

## Irony

- I. *That long preserved virginity/ And  
your quaint honour turn to dust*

- → To keep her honour, the mistress sticks to her principle to remain her virginity.





- But after she dies, **all she keeps turn out to be dust and nothing meaningful is left.**
- The speaker tries to argue whether virginity is honourable to her.

II. *The grave's fine and private place/ But none, I  
think, do there embrace*

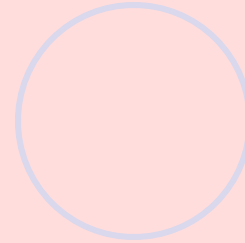
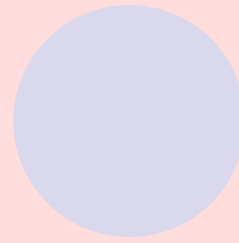
→ The speaker uses ironic tone to **threaten**  
the mistress if she doesn't seize the day to  
have fun, she will regret once she dies.

III. *Deserts of eternity/ And your quaint honor  
turn dust/ And into ashes all my lust.*

→ The speaker said the desert is eternal because it isn't affected by time.

In the later lines, the speaker compares **quaint honor** to **dust**, and **lust** to **ashes**.

Although dust and ashes are eternal, just like the desert, these two things are meaningless.



humans are mortal, humans should seize the time to do whatever they would like to do.

The speaker persuades the mistress to express the desire and seize the day to enjoy life.



# Allusion

- 1. *I would love you before the Flood.....* (Line 8)
- ◆ “Flood” happened in the story of Noah ark, which occurs in Genesis some time after creation.
- It indicates he shall love her early in history.

2. *And you should, if you please,  
refuse..... the conversion of Jews.*

(Line 9,10)

According to the Bible, “the  
conversion of Jews” will come before  
the end of the world, which is  
**judgment day.**

the speaker would love the mistress  
shortly before the end of the world.

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3. *That long preserved virginity,  
and your quaint honor turn to  
dust.* ( Line 28-29)

◆ “Quaint honor” represents what the mistress is keeping now, which is her long **preserved virginity**.



# Imagery

- 1. *Vegetable* ( Line 11)
- ◆ The symbolic meaning of “Vegetable Love” is deep and unconsciously growing love.
- The root of the vegetable is deep into the soil and the vegetable grows slowly, just like the speaker’s love toward the mistress **in an ideal state**.





2. But at my back I always hear  
Time's winged chariot hurrying  
near.

(Line 21-22)

◆ Time flies. “Winged” and “Chariot”  
represent something **passing quickly**.

3. Thy beauty shall no more.....

marble vault shall sound my

echoing song.

(Line 25-27)

It means when the mistress “dies”, she won’t be able to enjoy life anymore.

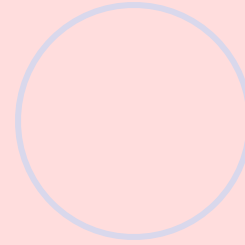
4. Now let us sport us while we

May

And now, like amorous birds of prey

(Line 37-38)

“Sport” means “making love”.



The speaker convinces the mistress that they should make love passionately and don't repress their desire for sex just like "amorous birds of prey".



5. *Tear our pleasure with rough*

*strife*

(Line 43)

◆ "Strife" originally means "fight."

But here, "strife" means "orgasm,"

A decorative header consisting of six circles in a light blue color. The first two circles are solid, the third is an outline, the fourth is solid, the fifth is an outline, and the sixth is solid.

## 6. *Iron gates of life*

(Line 44)

◆ “Iron gates of life” means “death.”

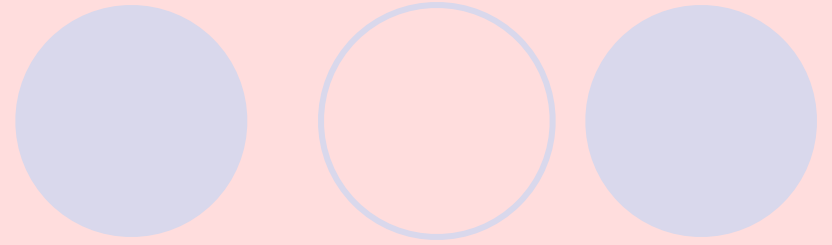
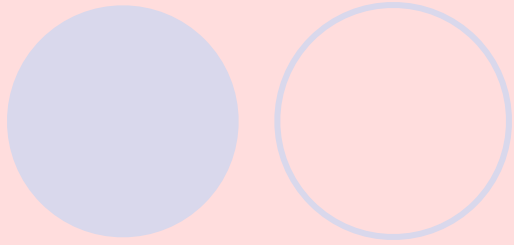
When making love, they are not afraid of death.

7. We cannot make our sun Stand still,

*yet we will make him run.* (Line 45-46)

◆ In this sentence, using the word “sun” is a kind pun.

One is “Sun” represents “heat” but it still can’t affect our love, and even our passion can **melt** the Sun.



The other is that the sun means  
“time,” and we have to speed up the  
time.





- The last lines bring the reader back to the idea of time again: the lovers' physical union has the power to change time by making the sun "run."

## Author

# ● Andrew Marvell

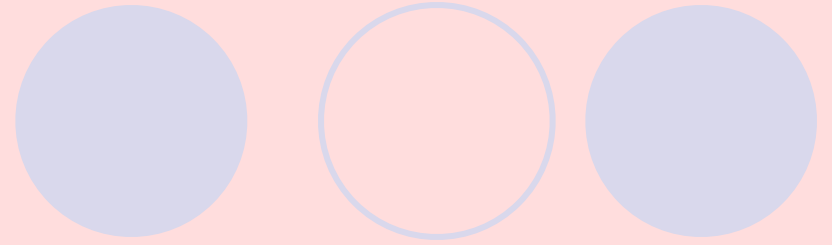
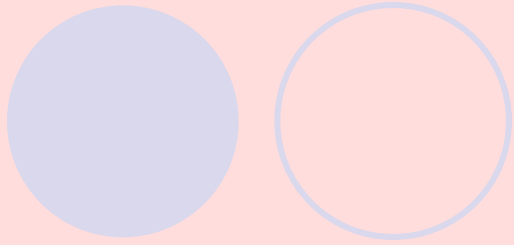
- Born in Hull in 1621.
- At the age of 12, he began
- studies at Trinity College, Cambridge.
- His studies were brought to an abrupt end when he was 20 with his father's death.





## Author

- He spent much of the 1640s travelling round Europe and managed to miss fighting in the English civil war...
- but did return to become first a tutor and then an MP and used satire to great effect to attack his political enemies, especially the rich and landowning loyalists.



His death, in 1678, was supposedly of a fever, but a religious group, the Jesuits, whom he had attacked, were suspected of poisoning him

# The Metaphysical poets



A group of poets from the early 1600s who were concerned with the subject of **what it is to be human** and tended to concentrate on **those aspects that seem to set us aside from other animals.**

# The Metaphysical poets



They dealt with serious **topics such as love and the relationship between man and God.**

The structure of the poetry - reflects the content and they are often **structured as arguments.**

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# The Metaphysical poets



Metaphysical poems are characterised by the **use of wit, irony and wordplay** and although often **comic on the surface**, deal with serious topics underneath.