Time and Cognition in Marvell’s “To his Coy Mistress”

Francisco J. Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez
Universidad de la Rioja
francisco.ruizdemendoza@unirioja.es

María Asunción Barreras Gómez
Universidad de la Rioja
asuncion.barreras@unirioja.es

Abstract

Andrew Marvell's poem “To his coy mistress” has generally been taken as one more example of the carpe diem tradition in literature. This tradition makes use of time metaphors, especially time is a resource. However, we find that Marvell exploits this and other time metaphors in ways that go beyond the traditional understanding of the carpe diem motif. We first give an overview of the treatment of the notion of time within Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which is then applied to the understanding of central thematic and structural aspects of the poem. We stress the importance of the metaphors time is a resource, time moves, events are actions and a cluster of metaphors revolving around the carpe diem motif. Finally, the paper discusses how Marvell imaginatively organizes what otherwise would be considered mere stock metaphors into an intricate logical network specifically tailored to sustain an argumentative line.

Keywords

carpe diem – Cognitive Poetics – Conceptual Metaphor Theory – time metaphors

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1 Introduction

Marvell’s “To his coy mistress”, written in the early 1650s, is a poem where the speaker addresses a lady who does not seem to respond to his love entreaties in the way that he would desire, which is one of physical intimacy. In an argumentative fashion (cf. Reiff 2002), the speaker—in fact a would-be lover—stresses the idea of the passing of time and associated physical deterioration as the reason why both him and his beloved should grab the chance and enjoy life while they are still young. Thus, an initial analysis of the poem could easily place it within the *carpe diem* (‘seize the day’) literary tradition originated by Horace in his *Odes*.1 However, it has been argued that this poem is a subtle ironical piece on sexual seduction (Lee 2008), which would make the *carpe diem* motif subservient to other literary goals. Whichever the ultimate goal, what literary critics have so far ignored is the creative use that Marvell makes of the notion of time to structure his poem thematically, thereby giving an original twist to the *carpe diem* tradition. In effect, as will become evident throughout our discussion, this poem should not simply be read as a matter of “enjoy the day while it lasts”, but in terms of subjectively transcending objective time through the physical manifestation of love. This reading is induced through the reorganization of the logic of a number of time-related metaphorical patterns into an alternative (and imaginary) world.

Marvell’s poetry has been discussed in its metaphysical context (cf. Bennett 1989), from the point of view of philological and historical analysis (e.g. Chambers 2010), and in the context of literary and cultural traditions (e.g. Loxley 2012). There has also been more specific work on “To his coy mistress” based on the analysis of its imagery (e.g. Braekman 2004), archetypes (e.g. Mahdi 2011), and formal stylistic aspects (e.g. Reiff 2002). However, to date, there is no analysis that takes into account the author’s original techniques to construct an alternative conceptual universe while seemingly using recurring thematic conventions. As will be shown in this article, Marvell goes beyond such traditional literary conventions.

The metaphorical dimension of time has been a matter of special concern within Cognitive Linguistics (see Lakoff and Johnson 1999, Evans 2003, 2013a, b, Moore 2014a, b, and the references therein), which, especially within the framework of *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999),

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1 The term *carpe diem* is used to invite readers to make the most out of life and enjoy it before it ends. In the field of literary analysis there have been interesting studies on the *carpe diem* motif, such as Yandell (1994) on Renaissance women writers or Winn (2006) on the Hollywood romantic comedy.
highlights the common linguistic exploitation of space and motion to talk about time and the passage of time respectively. The time-space correlation is naturally grounded in our experience of motion taking place in space and time. Of course, the existence of such an experiential grounding does not mean that people are necessarily aware of how it affects the way they conceptualize time. However, this is not the case in literary language. The poet has the ability to reveal and exploit in surprising ways conceptual connections that go unnoticed to the common mind.\footnote{There are many creative aspects of the everyday mind that are particularly conspicuous in literary language, like the ability to integrate images, and the related ability to engage in counterfactual thinking. These topics have been the object of a large amount of detailed work within the context of \textit{Blending Theory} \cite[see especially Turner 1996, and Fauconnier and Turner 2002; see also the collection of papers in Birke, Butter, and Köppe 2011]. Blending Theory attests the possibility of role reversal, role fusion, and the idiosyncratic integration of conceptual structure for specific communicative purposes. For example, in the Grim Reaper metaphor, the Grim Reaper, which metonymically stands for death, becomes the causer of death too \cite[see section 4.2 below for further comments]. However, Blending Theory is focused on cognitive processes, while the present study pays attention to the way in which unconventional conceptual connections and role reversal help to endow a poem with a skillfully delineated argumentative and thematic structure.}

Within this research context, the present article explores the use of time metaphors in Marvell’s poem “To his coy mistress”, which, in connection to the \textit{carpe diem} motif, support its thematic structure. It will be argued that such structure responds to an overarching premise-conclusion reasoning schema that divides the poem into two parts. The first one, the “premise”, groups together the first and second stanzas. It presents the reasons that the lover gives to his beloved to engage in sexual intimacy with him. The second part, the conclusion, takes up the third stanza. The first and second stanzas are each internally developed on the basis of one central time metaphor, other metaphors being subservient to this one. The third stanza contains a number of metaphors that contribute to the idiosyncratic use of the \textit{carpe diem} motif in this poem.

The rest of this article has the following structure. First, it briefly introduces the \textit{carpe diem} motif and the metaphorical use of time in everyday language. For the discussion on time metaphors, it mainly draws on the insights in Lakoff and Johnson \cite{1980, 1999} and Lakoff and Turner \cite{1989}. There follows an analysis of Marvell’s “To his coy mistress”. This analysis is divided into three sections, each devoted to one of the three stanzas of the poem. The relevance of the metaphor \textit{time is a resource} in the first stanza and of \textit{time moves} in the second stanza is elucidated through a detailed discussion of several examples.
The third section addresses a cluster of metaphors revolving around the concept of *carpe diem*. It will be argued that these new metaphors are used to flesh out the conclusion part of the reasoning pattern mentioned above. The kind of analysis here proposed is expected to add to the pool of studies generally known as Cognitive Poetics, which apply theoretical issues developed within Cognitive Linguistics to a better understanding of literary phenomena (cf. Tsur 2002, Freeman 2006, Harrison and Stockwell 2014). The analysis is also intended to cast light on how the reversal of the internal logic of experience-based metaphors can be exploited for special literary purposes. This is an issue that needs greater attention within the standard treatment of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, as will be evidenced below. Finally, it should be noted that it is not the intention of the present article to discuss all aspects of the imagery of Marvell’s poem, but only those that more directly affect its main thesis as outlined above.

2  A Brief Note on *Carpe Diem* and Persuasiveness in Poetry

As is well known, the *carpe diem* motif emphasises how short life is and suggests that one should enjoy the pleasures of the here and now. This motif has been important in lyric poetry, where the poet addresses his beloved with a persuasive tone in order to gain her love. It is for this reason that the poet emphasizes “seizing the day.”

The term *carpe diem* was coined by Horace in his *Odes* (*Carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero* 1, 11, ‘seize the day, trusting as little as possible in the next day’). It then became a motif that was developed by Ausonius (*Collige, virgo, rosas* ‘gather, girl, the roses’), Catullus (*Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus* ‘Let us live, my Lesbia, and let us love’) and Martial (*Sera nimis vita est crastina: Vive Hodie*, ‘tomorrow is too late to live: live today’) in the classical literature. In the English Renaissance, which is characterized by the revival of the classical world of Greece and Rome via Italy, poets adapted modes (such as pastoral literature) or motifs (such as *carpe diem*) into the English language and poetical tradition. They used the *carpe diem* motif in order to reason about the brevity of life and the need to take pleasure in human passion. This motif was adopted by English Renaissance poets, like Christopher Marlow in “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love”, Walter Raleigh in “The Nymph’s Reply to the Shepherd”, Edmund Waller in “Go, Lovely Rose”, Ben Jonson in “Song to Celia”, John Donne in “The Flea”, and Robert Herrick in “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time”. Each poet uses a different persuasive strategy with greater or smaller emphasis on the urge to seize the day. The emphasis is very small in Ben Jonson’s “The Flea”, where the thrust of the poet’s argument is the comparison
between the immateriality of killing a flea and of the lady accepting his sexual entreaties. It is greater in Herrick’s “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time”, where the temporariness of the beauty of a flower brings to mind the quick loss of a lady’s prime. Marvell, in his much longer poem “To his coy mistress”, develops the same topic in a more complex way, based on a number of time metaphors that the lover uses to reason about the passing of time, all intended to urge his lady to have sexual intimacy with him. As we will see later, the carpe diem tradition is treated rather differently as the lover presents before his lady a number of imaginary scenarios whose internal logic render “seizing the day” the best logical conclusion.

3 On ‘Time’ Metaphors

As is well known, in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999; Lakoff 1993), metaphor is seen as a cognitive process, which allows us to understand one conceptual domain (the target) in terms of another domain (the source). The source domain is usually grounded in everyday experience, whereas the target domain can occur in any degree of abstraction. That is why the source domain helps us to reason about the target, whose conceptual layout and internal logic is not obvious from world experience. This is particularly the case with our understanding of the abstract notion of time. As Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 137) assert “[a]ll our understandings of time are relative to other concepts such as motion, space, and events.” There are many aspects of time that we think about in terms of basic experiences. For example, since events are repeated, this allows for time to be measured. Then, if we can quantify time, we can give it a value. We also relate our experience of events with continuous directional change. So time is also related to motion. This makes it possible for us to automatically apply the source-domain schema of motion in space to the target domain of the passage of time, thus endowing our conceptualization of time with a one-dimensional nature in many languages (cf. Boroditsky 2000: 4).

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3 The amount of literature on cmt is immense. The reader may be referred to the critical revisions and developments in Dirven and Ruiz de Mendoza (2010), Ruiz de Mendoza and Pérez (2011), Gibbs (2011), and the collection of papers in González et al. (2013).

4 Note that time is often encoded in its own temporal terms, as extensively argued in Evans (2013b). For example, in many languages grammatical systems such as tense, aspect, and modality encode temporal notions, and languages also have lexical terms denoting temporal relations (e.g. precedence, simultaneity), points in time (e.g. yesterday, now), or frequency (always, never) that are in principle unrelated to spatial concepts (see also Galton 2011).
The time orientation metaphor is entrenched in English and in general in all western culture. The location of the observer is the present, the space in front of the observer is the future, and the space behind the observer is the past (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 140). According to Kövecses (2006: 135), culture in the conceptual metaphor context is a “set of shared understandings of the world, where our understandings [...] are mental representations structured by cultural models or frames.” The time orientation metaphor is a long-lasting one in our culture so our understanding of it is automatic (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 51). The time orientation metaphor allows us to unconsciously conceptualize the relationship between events and time. This underlies expressions containing the idea of life’s path, such as Horace’s attributed quotation “Remember when life’s path is steep to keep your mind even”, and the more complex metaphor life is a journey, as evidenced by expressions like As he goes through life he will make friends and His goal in life is to go to university. The metaphor life is a journey is based on the understanding of progress (in time) to achieve one’s goals in terms of forward motion along a path (see Lakoff 1993). As is well known from work in psychology, two time metaphors hinge on the logic of the time orientation metaphor. In one of them, called moving time, time is seen as an object that moves towards the observer (e.g. The time for action has arrived), while in the other, called moving ego, it is the observer that moves (e.g. We’re getting close to the end of the course) (cf. Clark 1973, Lakoff and Johnson 1980). As will become evident in section 4.2 below, the first of these two metaphors is of interest for our analysis of Marvell’s poem (“Time’s winged chariot hurrying near”). There is some logic behind this. Note that the moving time conceptualization creates a conceptual framework that is more consistent

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5 Recent studies show that the basic understanding of the space-time relationship is substantially the same across cultures, with most variation being a matter of perspective (cf. Moore 2014a,b) and time and space becoming hardly distinguishable from each other. By contrast, the analysis of temporal frames of reference (Evans 2003, 2003a,b) and psychological experiments (e.g. Casasanto and Boroditsky 2008) lend support to the contention that time and space are clearly distinguishable categories, although there is also evidence that it is easier for speakers to think about space without reference to time, than the other way around (Casasanto and Boroditsky 2008). In any event, the observations in the present paper are not affected by these controversies, since, as will become apparent from the analysis in the following sections, time categorization in “To his Coy Mistress”—in consonance with Marvell’s western cultural milieu, which includes the carpe diem motif—follows the cultural patterns, grounded in experience, discussed in Lakoff and Johnson (1999) and Kövecses (2006).

6 This general trend is almost universal. One exception has been noted by Núñez and Sweetser (2006). Speakers of Aymara use a “witness” system of referring to past and future, such that the future is what one cannot see (as if it were behind the speaker) and the past is what one knows about, i.e. what one can see as if it were ahead of the speaker.
than the moving ego metaphor with the metaphorical understanding of time as a destroyer, which, as part and parcel of the carpe diem motif, is also relevant to our discussion of Marvell’s poem. Rather than moving towards destructive time, we observe time inevitably reaching our position and causing physical deterioration and ultimately death (cf. Lakoff and Turner 1989: 46). By contrast, the moving ego metaphor is generally consistent with (usually positive) notions such as reaching landmarks (We are getting close to Christmas) and enabling prospective achievement (We are entering a new era).

Lakoff and Turner (1989) have identified other ways of understanding time. These also show in the poem. This is the case of time is resource and the related metaphor time is a valuable commodity (e.g. How long does it take you?, You have plenty of time, You’re wasting my time!). Time is seen as resource because of our experience of developing our everyday life activities, including those that will return a benefit, over specific periods of time. Other metaphors of interest for our analysis, which provide different perspectives on the notion of time, are time is a changer (e.g. Time heals all wounds), time is a reaper (e.g. Time harvests body and soul), and time is devourer (e.g. Time will devour the very way that we exist), which is but a specification of time is a destroyer (e.g. Time destroys everything) already mentioned above. These metaphors are based on naïve observations on natural processes, which underlie erroneous cause-effect relationships where time is regarded as the reason behind observable aspects of the passage of time (e.g. material erosion, physical deterioration, cessation of existence). Some of these metaphors underlie cultural symbolism. In this connection, think of the Grim Reaper, i.e. the representation of death as a skeleton in a robe and a cowl carrying a scythe in his hand, as illustrated by the image of death on tarot cards. We will return to this metaphor in section 4.2 below.

Bearing all the above in mind, the subsequent analysis in section 4 will address the different metaphorical ways of dealing with the notion of time that go beyond the traditional carpe diem motif in Marvell’s poem.

4 Analysis of Marvell’s “To his Coy Mistress”

“To his coy mistress” is presented as a declaration of love from the speaker (not necessarily the poet7) to a young lady who avoids engaging herself in physical

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7 Some critics argue that this poem could be based on a personal love story (cf. Hühn 2011: 46). Whether this is the case or not is irrelevant to our purposes, since the poem is written, as Hühn himself indicates, in a persuasive mode. In our view, Marvell makes use of argumentative
intimacy with him. As a way of persuading her to have sexual intercourse, the speaker reasons in ways that are suggestive of the “seize the day” motif.

According to Hühn (2011: 46) Marvell’s poem has three parts, each of which narrates a different version of the lover’s own love-story. In the first two stanzas, the lover rejects two traditional approaches to love: the first one (in the first stanza) is hypothetical and unreal (the lover misuses time in fruitless contemplation of his lady’s beauty); the second one (in the second stanza) is real and set in the future (the lover becomes aware of the passage of time with the moment of death ineludibly approaching). The third stanza presents an altogether different approach: it is imperative and located in the present: the lover urges her beloved to become involved in the passionate expression of love and, in so doing, to become emotionally dissociated from the quickness of the passage of time. In our view, it is this last stanza that exploits the carpe diem motif by way of conclusion of an argumentation schema of which the two previous stanzas are merely preparatory: the first one questions the usefulness of spending time in contemplation (“Had we but world enough, and time, / This coyness, lady, were no crime”); the second one warns the beloved lady about death approaching; the third one is the “logical” conclusion, explicitly marked as such (“Now, therefore”): since the lovers cannot stop time from passing, it is better to enjoy the moment and overcome time. These three perspectives on time structure the poem thematically while making it into a persuasive argumentative schema.

We reproduce the poem below for the sake of convenience.

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
Should’st 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

structure and rhetoric either to produce a simulation of real persuasion or for mere aesthetic effects.
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-preserved virginity,
And you 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-chapt 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.

In the rest of this section we discuss this poem by making use of the cognitive-linguistic approach to time metaphors as outlined in section 3. It will become evident throughout the ensuing discussion that time is central to the persuasive thematic structure in this poem.
4.1 Time is a Resource

The first metaphor is **time is a resource**, which is used in everyday expressions such as *You're almost out of time* or *Don't waste your time*. With this metaphor people conceptualize time as a specific resource, like money. This conceptualization is supported by our experience of the correlation between the passage of time and the opportunities to acquire objects and meet life's aims. The poem exploits this metaphor in the first stanza by constructing a number of impossible situations intended to raise the lady's awareness about the lovers' lack of this precious "resource". The result is a series of counterfactual scenarios, which, interestingly enough, are constructed by negating the applicability of the experiential metaphor **time is a resource** to their situation. In essence, what the poem conveys is that time is not a resource for the lover and his beloved.

In the first lines the poem expresses the lover's worry about the passing of time and what it involves, that is, negative change and mortality. In consonance, through a skillful combination of hyperbole and metaphor, the lover disapprovingly depicts the lady's coyness as a "crime". The underlying implication is that there is not enough time for both lovers to be engaged in virtually indefinite courtship. The lover thus describes how he would love the lady if their lifespans were much longer. In that hypothetical situation, he can see himself wooing the lady eternally since time would not be important and there would be no urgency for the lady to respond to his physical intimacy requirements. In the poem, time is experienced as a precious resource, which can be used inadequately. That is why the first two lines ("Had we but world enough, and time, /This coyness, lady, were no crime") convey feelings of regret over the lady's evasiveness, which results in the two lovers' waste of time. The lover wants his beloved lady to realize that he does not oppose her natural, instinctive evasiveness as such, but only her evasiveness in a situation in which it will lead to a misuse of time. That is, the lover wants his lady to recontextualize her approach to the development of their love in terms of the metaphor **time is a resource**. Such a recontextualization is but an example of what discourse analysts—following Fillmore's insights into frame structure as the way to organize the world of our experience in terms of characters, objects, their properties and their roles (Fillmore 1982, 1985)—have labeled **reframing**, i.e. the shift in our focus of attention on an object or situation in terms of its background context (cf. Tannen 2006, 2011). The lady's coyness can be desirable in a context in which she has enough time to conquer her social taboos, but not in one where such a personality trait will lead to inaction. The poem starts by setting up two initial contrasting frames: one is the lady's reverie, which is depicted through the image of the lady fancifully finding rubies by
the Ganges river; the other is the lover’s view of himself in the more mundane landscape of the Humberside estuary in the Northeast of England. There is a touch of truth-evincing irony in this contrast, which supports the lover’s argumentative line where he wants his lady to shift from the former to the latter more realistic frame for their love relationship. There is a second pair of contrasting frames, which are grounded in religious history: the Flood, when most life on Earth was terminated as a punishment from God, and the future large-scale conversion of the Jews (Rom 11:20–26; Cf. Mt 23:39; cf. Moo 1996: 724), which in common Christian lore, based on Jesus’s words as recorded in the New Testament in Matthew 24, has been associated with the widespread wars and disaster that will precede Christ’s return. If reframed through time is a resource, these frames lead to the following situation: if they had enough time, for the sake of his beloved lady, the lover could risk waiting from before the Flood to the future, clearly uncertain, conversion of the Jews. Interestingly enough, the point of connection of the two frames is found in the idea of imminent destruction associated with them. The implication, in their metaphorical reframing, is that, given enough time, the lover would be willing to face the dangers involved. But this courage is pointless precisely because time is a limited resource.

The lover then uses implicit argumentation based on novel extensions of conventional correspondences, or novel metaphors (following Lakoff and Turner 1989), in order to call for further reframing of the love relationship. First, he notes that, while waiting in vain, his love could keep growing forever at a slow pace (“vaster than empires and more slow”). Here, the imagery combines the conventional metaphor life is a plant with hyperbole into a novel metaphor. In the same vein, he introduces the contrast between physical attraction and spiritual love, depicting a hypothetical contemplative scenario, also grounded in hyperbole, where, enthralled by the beauty of his beloved lady and with no urge, love could be allowed to develop for virtually any amount of time, however large the lover could thus spend inordinate amounts of years praising every part of the lady’s body, such as her eyes, forehead, breast, and heart, only if he had an eternity to do so. It is worth noting that this enumeration ends up with the lady’s heart. The lover starts by focusing on her physical attributes to finish with her spiritual side, which is what would ultimately matter in the hypothetical scenario. But it is only within that scenario that the lover would not love her “at lower rate”, as evidenced by the thematic

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8 This image could be reminiscent of the various legends according to which the Ganges river originates in a huge jujube tree next to which there is a hermitage filled with celestial trees and flowers and, by the tree, a set of stairs of rubies and corals (Darian 2001: 60).
development of the next stanza where, as we shall see, a different metaphor, i.e. time catching up with the lovers as suggestive of death, negates the applicability of time is a resource for them.

We are now in a position to correlate the elements of the metaphor time is a resource, as outlined by Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 162–163) with specific elements in the poem:

The Resource [a countable object] - - - - -> Time
The User of the Resource - - - - > The Agent [the lover and the lady as engaged in a love relationship]
The Purpose that requires the Resource [Using the object] - - - - -> The Purpose that Requires Time [having an intimate relationship]
The Value of the Resource [limited] - - - - -> The Value of Time [limited, as implied in the lover's mention of the long stretches of time that he cannot devote to contemplating his beloved's beauty]
The Value of the Purpose [limited] - - - - -> The Value of the Purpose [limited since the lack of time prevents an idealistic non-carnal relationship to develop as the beloved would wish]

The lover reasons about the vastness offered by the world and time itself in terms of the natural limitedness of a Resource: "Had we but world enough, and time,/This coyness, lady, were no crime". The Users of the Resource are both the lady and the lover as engaged in a love relationship. The goal (the use of the object) is having an intimate relationship with the lady. Finally, the Value of the Resource and the Value of Time are limited. On the basis of the logic of the metaphorical source, the lover expects his beloved to understand the limitedness of their lifespan and the lover's urge for her to give up her coy attitude. In this context, misusing their time is treated, also metaphorically, as a "crime," i.e. a breach, in this case, of natural law that leads to an unjust, and senseless condition.

4.2 Time Moves and other Events are Actions metaphors
As mentioned in section 3, there are two perspectives in the conceptualization of time in connection to motion: in one, time moves toward the observer, and in the other the observer moves toward time. When talking about the future, we can either see the future as moving toward us (e.g. Christmas is coming on) or we can think of ourselves moving toward the future (e.g. We are getting close to Christmas) (cf. Lakoff and Turner 1989: 44). In both perspectives we are situated at the present and in both we are facing toward the future with our back
turned on the past. As further noted by Moore (2014b: 376), it is only in the former perspective, in which time moves toward us, that we can have two movers, as in *Spring follows winter*. This conceptualization follows the *two-mover* constraint, which, in a summarized form, stipulates that the two entities move with respect to the same frame of reference and in the same direction, sequence being understood as relative position on a path. In *Spring follows winter* we think of spring as happening later than winter on the basis of the implication that, since spring was behind winter, once winter is over, spring will be next. In Marvell’s poem we have a related, but different, construal of time, which is seen as racing toward the two lovers:

> But at my back I always hear  
> Time’s winged chariot hurrying near

In this development of the *time moves* metaphor, the lover and his lady are being caught up by time, which is seen as a pursuer that is quickly approaching them. The image of the winged chariot is borrowed from Greek mythology. Originally, the Sun god, as is well known, was depicted as traveling across the sky in a chariot pulled by winged horses (i.e. the daily journey of Helios). Under further development the chariot began to be represented with wings and without horses. The use of wings is consonant with the visual experience of the sun moving across the sky rather than on land, while the horse-pulled two-wheel chariot was a fast vehicle. The image thus combines speed and the notion of the passage of time in relation to the day-night cycle, which makes it an appropriate development of the metaphor *time moves*.

There is an additional implication in the use of the this metaphor. This implication involves a reframing of *time moves* to make it include a causal ingredient, thus making it into a subcase of the *events are actions* metaphor. The implication is that when time actually catches up with the lovers, they will be affected by it in the way experience teaches us that time affects people:

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9 There are other possible exploitations of this metaphorical construal of time. For example, within a different analytical context, Fauconnier and Turner (1994) have noted that “being ahead of schedule” is positive while “being ahead of oneself” is not. This can be easily seen from the comparison between these two utterances. The reason for this is that there is something wrong about people competing against themselves, but not about people being engaged in an event in advance of its scheduled moment (see also Ruiz de Mendoza 1998).
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 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.

These verses bring to the fore the effects of time in terms of aging (thus destroying beauty) and final death, metonymically symbolized by the grave, which is in turn metonymically invoked by “thy marble vault” in the text. Through this reframing, death (which is an event) is now seen as an agent or instigator of death-related processes within an action frame. That is, time moves gives way to the events are actions metaphor, as originally described by Lakoff and Turner (1989) and Lakoff (1993), to account for such personifications of time as time is a reaper that brings about death (see the discussion of this metaphor in Ruiz de Mendoza 1998). In time is a reaper, time is seen as a causal agent that causes death, in the same way as a reaper causes the death of the plants that he harvests. This metaphor underlies the symbolic image of the Grim Reaper, i.e. time dressed with a robe and carrying a scythe, as mentioned in section 2.10

One of the metaphors of the events are actions system is time is a changer. There are different instances of this metaphor in this stanza. The first instance focuses on time first wasting away the lady’s beauty (Thy beauty shall no more be found) to eventually bring about both her death. The argumentative line of the lover is based on highlighting a number of facts. These are the following. In the burial chamber, however magnificent (the “marble vault”), there will be no songs of love (Nor, in the marble vault, shall sound my echoing song), lustful desires, or love-making of any kind (none, I think, do there embrace). Time is a changer then takes the more specific forms of time is a devourer and time is a destroyer. In the metonymic invocation of death where “worms” are the devouring agents of the physical body, the moral attributes that the lady holds in high esteem are rendered worthless: the lady’s

10 For an in-depth exploration of the Grim Reaper cultural motif, associated with death, from the perspective of blending theory within Cognitive Linguistics, see Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 291–295). Time itself does not cause death, but is culturally perceived as a causer of death because of the intrinsic association between the passage of time and the aging process that leads to death.
virginity loses all of its value (*Then worms shall try/that long preserved virginity*), her honor becomes irrelevant, and her chastity and her reputation for chastity follow the same path as her decaying body (*And your quaint honour turn to dust*). The lover's lust, naturally, is no exception to the ravages of time bringing about destruction and thereby death: "And into ashes all my lust".

4.3 *A Cluster of Metaphors Revolving Around the Concept of Carpe Diem in the Third Stanza*

The first stanza sets up different scenarios that negate the value of the metaphor *time is a resource* for the lover and his lady, while *time moves does apply in their case*. The argumentative line, as was briefly outlined above, is as follows. If they could have enough time, the lover would use it to extol his lady's virtues. But this is not the case, as argued in the second stanza, where time is depicted as a pursuer trying to get hold of the two lovers thereby causing their deterioration and death before they have had the occasion to enjoy their love relationship. This argumentative line is finished with the third stanza, in which the lover attempts to persuade his lady to engage herself in physical intimacy with him. As noted before, this argumentative development takes the form of a premise-conclusion reasoning pattern of the kind studied in philosophy and in pragmatics (cf. Sperber and Wilson 2004). The first stanza cancels out what the lover thinks is an erroneous premise held by his lady (i.e. time is not a resource for them); the second stanza substitutes a correct premise for the erroneous one (i.e. in terms of events are actions time will affect them negatively); the third stanza is the conclusion, marked explicitly ("now, therefore"), which follows from the second premise upheld by the lover: since time runs against them, they need to seize the day, which is the traditional *carpe diem* motif. However, there is a hyperbolic enhancement of this motif based on creating a complex counterfactual scenario that is constructed through a cluster of images that combine to reverse the negative effects of the real-world situation where time will take its toll on the lovers.

First, the poem sets the stage for the *carpe diem* motif through a combination of metaphors:

- **A property is a substance**: the lady's "youthful hue", which is metonymically indicative of her healthy and youthful complexion (the state she is in), is metaphorically seen as a substance that is placed on the lady's skin.
- **A lifetime is a day**: the substance (source domain of the previous metaphor) is compared, through explicit simile, with the morning dew, which is metonymic for the beginning of the day; this metonymic target is then mapped, through a second metaphor, onto the lady's young age.
– **Life is a fluid**: the lady’s ardent soul figuratively permeates through her skin; passion is further seen metaphorically as fire (emotion is heat).

Then, the poem goes into the implications of the motif in a highly creative and original way by either reversing or cancelling out the effects of the metaphors of the second stanza. In this reversal, the lovers will devour time (*And now, like amorous birds of prey, /Rather at once our time devour*). Instead of accepting the fact that time is the devourer that will lead them to “[languish] in his slow-chapt power”, the lover proposes their devouring time like “birds of pray.” The lover wants to impose subjective time over objective time. Objectively, time will bring deterioration and death to the two lovers, but subjectively they can cancel out the effects of time. There is an interesting asymmetry in reversing the time-destroyer metaphor: time can “destroy” the lovers, but the lovers cannot “destroy” time; they can only subjectively override the effects of time on their relationship, e.g. by becoming engaged in love-making in such a passionate way that they can ignore time. This alternative way of looking at the time-devourer conceptual connection is further developed in the following verses:

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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.
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A plausible interpretation of these verses involves the image of the two lovers during physical intimacy. Their strength and sweetness are metonymic indications of such a situation. This metonymy is then used to construct a metaphor in which the lovers, probably embracing and thereby encircling each other, perceptually resemble a ball that, on one further figurative development, can be envisaged as going through the “iron gates of life”,¹ⁱ which is a metaphor of death. All this figurative activity is but a poetic exploitation of the basic logic of the metaphor **life is an enclosure**, which is but a specification of a **(change of) state is a (change of) location**: having life is being in a location; losing one’s life is going out of such a location. The two lovers,

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¹¹ Here some manuscripts read “iron grates” rather than “gates” (cf. Hirst and Zwicker 2011: 43). Either “gates” (a structure that is intended to block an entrance) or “grates” (a framework of parallel or latticed bars intended to block an opening) is consistent with the metaphor of death: going beyond the structure (of whatever type) that separates life from death involves dying. However, the version with “gates” would be suggestive of a play on the traditional expression “iron gates of death” (cf. Wilcher 1985).
while in the act of making love, can be willingly ignoring that they are approaching death. And as a ball can inadvertently roll out of an enclosure, the lovers can “roll out of” life.

The end of the poem brings one further image into the picture based on the metonymic connection between the apparent motion of the sun in the sky and the passage of time. Objectively, the sun cannot be stopped, which means that the passage of time is inalterable (though we cannot make our sun/ Stand still). But from a subjective perspective the two lovers can speed up the passage of time (yet we will make him run) as they keep involved in passionate love-making. This situation is certainly paradoxical, since, under normal circumstances, it would be desirable for two lovers to feel like time is moving slowly, so they can enjoy their sexual relationship longer. However, in the lover’s logic, rampant passion will make the real amount of time that they have look shorter, which will feel unimportant in a situation of intense display of emotions and pleasure.

5 Conclusions

As mentioned in the introduction to this article, some scholars have noted that Cognitive Linguistics offers theoretical insights that can be applied to enhance our understanding of literary works. We have seen evidence of this in our analysis of “To his coy mistress”. This poem is a clearly unorthodox exploitation of the *carpe diem* motif, which, together with the *memento mori* (‘remember that you will die’), has pervaded western literature over the centuries. Marvell makes an ingenious use of this motif, achieved through his skillful use of figurative language, especially of time metaphors, which further sustain the thematic structure of the poem. Marvell’s specific treatment of the *carpe diem* motif distances him from contemporaries, who, like Robert Herrick, adhered to the traditional (and perhaps trivial) aspects of the motif based on stressing the temporality of youth and the sadness that arises from becoming aware of this. Marvell, by contrast, imaginatively organizes what otherwise would be considered mere stock metaphors into an intricate logical network specifically tailored to sustain an argumentative line. In principle, the basic logic of the poem looks simple and is no breach of the *carpe diem* motif: there is not enough time for the lover to spend in virtually indefinite contemplation of his beloved’s beauty, since time goes by and death approaches. But in Marvell’s hands, the *carpe diem* motif is more than such. It is the foundation upon which to build a personal worldview on love and passion as central components of an altogether different universe where
objective time is no longer a threat, so much so that both lovers, if they will yield to passion, would not even mind accelerating their own deaths.

6 Bibliography


