

At first, there would appear to be little in common between a poem that attempts to persuade a mistress and one that commemorates an anniversary. Indeed, there are few sentiments that "The Anniversary" and "To His Coy Mistress" share. Yet, these are love poems and there must be some common ground that unites them on some plane. There is, of course, such a common point of reference and it lies in the attitudes towards time that we find expressed in these poems.

Marvell's conception of time is ever changing in "To His Coy Mistress," but this is only to be expected in a poem that seeks to convince by constructing an ideal and proceeding to demonstrate its utopian nature. In the world of would and should that we are immersed in before the pivotal "But" in the second stanza, Marvell presents an idyllic view of lovers engaged in a slow waltz that stretches on for centuries. In this snail-paced ritual Marvell feels he can do justice to his mistress, who "deserve this state." Things become a little more complex in the next line, "nor would I love at lower rate." This is where we begin a question what has up till now progressed so smoothly, as all good fantasies must if they are to be successful. We begin to question this world of Marvell's creation and see the enigma that lies within the term "lower rate." We have been hearing of an agonizingly slow mating ritual, Marvell has been patiently dancing around is a mistress, praising her every aspect with a devotion that approaches what one would offer to the divine. How, we ask, can he slow down to a "lower rate?"

This is not the only striking aspect of the first stanza. We know that Marvell is speaking of a state we are unfamiliar with and in its unfamiliarity lies the force of his argument. The unfamiliar weaves in and out of our notion of the familiar as we seek to understand Marvell's position. We know, on one cognitive level, that in this state an aeon is insignificant, yet we lay on it the import we would ascribe to an aeon in the human sense. For the beings Marvell speaks of, ages pass by as minutes; indeed we acknowledge that they must, or else why would one devote "An hundred years" to "praise thine eyes." Though Marvell suggests that centuries could be spent admiring every aspect of his mistress, we cannot imagine such prolonged ritual unless centuries mean less than what they do to us, as indeed they must be beings who love for millennia. It is necessary, if one is to be convinced by this argument, to occupy two positions simultaneously. The first is the acceptance of Marvell's illusion, of a state where one can spend aeons in a single activity, and yet it is essential to evaluate this period of time in human terms. If we waver too much in either direction, Marvell's persuasion would fail.

It is a testament to Marvell's skill that even when he breaks the spell, we continue to live in his illusionary time. We have been maintaining a delicate balance between two realities, two conceptions of time. Marvell makes us walk a tightrope between them and we comply. The fascinating thing is that even when he finds it necessary to destroy the illusion he has created, bring us back to the ground as it was, he does it in such a way that we do not sense it. Marvell lifts us gently from our precarious position on the tightrope we have been pacing on, the bridge between realities and gently places us on the ground. In this manner the beginning of his lament at the fleeting nature of time does not jar us as it wakes us from our daydream in the land of the eternal.

We find Marvell now occupying the role of a pharmacist. He has become one who is aware of his mortality and of the advance of time. Time now becomes an enemy to be feared, an enemy who is closing down on us, and the eternity that he earlier facilitated the requisite offering to his mistress now becomes a vast desert. It is ironic that to understand 'deserts of vast eternity' we call upon that very conception of the monotonous which we have failed to apply where it would be most apt. It would seem that a lover, any lover, would tire of spending "two hundred" years "to adore each breast." The same would be expected of a woman subjected to such unending praise, a long-song that keeps repeating itself will soon wear out both singer and listener. Yet we do not stop to reflect on this alternate view while reading the first stanza. Rather, we are not permitted to reflect on this aspect since the poem keeps ushering us along, presenting one image

after another in mind-numbing succession. Though Marvell is ostensibly describing something that is drawn out in time, for the reader it proceeds at a pace that does not allow for reflection. As one fantastic claim follows another, we cannot stop to think where they are leading to. We are trapped in Marvell's reality like Alice is trapped in Lewis Carroll's. When released from this fantastic world, it is only to enter a second where the doubts we should have had in the first stanza's reality are utilized to build another perspective. The release is only a temporary respite before we enter another mental cage, at once invisible and confining, of Marvell's making.

This might explain part of the effectiveness of "To His Coy Mistress" as a persuasive tract. If Marvell is so adept at guiding us through his train of thought, it is only to be expected that we are convinced of his argument. This is not because we feel his thoughts are in reality ours, that we have prophesied each shift and statement, but because we are grateful to Marvell for having shared them. In traveling along with Marvell on his rhetorical journey, we develop an affinity for him and his concerns. We become Marvell's sympathizers.

Donne's "The Anniversary" appears to proceed in a direction almost exactly opposite to the progression we have traced into His Coy Mistress. Ostensibly this is a poem that first suggests the ephemeral nature of all things that "to their destruction draw" and then counters it with a resounding proclamation attesting to the immortality of the poet's love. This can, of course, be easily explained away by calling on the purpose of the poem, the need to reaffirm love. If Donne is looking forward, at the first anniversary, to many years of union, it would seem natural to call upon us to imagine an endless love since this would be an articulation of his own hopes.

Yet as we might expect, Donne can only express a sense of eternity by contrasting it with what is fleeting. Thus, we hear of a love that "hath no decay" only after we realize that "All other things, to their destruction draw." In the movement from an impression of the ephemeral nature of all things to a claim of immortality lies the clue we need to understand a love that is always fresh. This method of setting up a dichotomy is employed once again in the second stanza where a contract is drawn between the mortal body that must decay, and the immortal soul that shall continue to love.

Yet we must look at the first stanza with some reserve, since it does appear a little convoluted. Donne suggests that all things have aged by a year. He is marking time by the passing of the sun and that of every other thing. It seems clear that time progresses only with change, and part of change is death. Witness, however, Donne's claim that his love does not change, is everlasting. This is not the everlasting day of the North and South poles, but a day where the sun does not wax and wane at all. It is interesting that Marvell finds it necessary to make his sun run since he cannot hold him still "Thus, though we cannot make our sun stand still, yet we will make him run," while Donne sees his sun passing him by and acknowledges this motion as inevitable and also essential. What Donne is writing of is a time that is alien to us, as alien as Marvell's ages. We cannot comprehend time unless it is marked by change and yet Donne places his love outside the progression of time. In his words, "This no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday." Here we see something trapped in time, in one latent state. Change, we not are life and suddenly this state of motionlessness appears to be nonexistence, either death or limbo. Now, the statement "our love hath no decay" begins to appear sinister. We see that this is a love that does not grow like Marvell's "vegetable love." Like a Faustian exchange, to acquire immortality -- a release from the steady march of time -- we are forced to give up all life, our existence for our love.

We are well aware that this site of non-change, non-life is not brought about by our having achieved the highest love. In fact, Donne is quite clear that the pinnacle of love is achieved by two souls that have been purified and condensed so that "nothing dwells but love," Death has become a release from the monotony of an endless love that will not let us escape, or for that matter, progress from its "first, last, everlasting day." Death becomes welcome now, not only because it marks a transcendence to a higher, purer love, but also since it is the only way

out of this trap that once sprung will not release us. Time, in this context, is no longer a healer because "running it never runs from us away." We are unable to distance ourselves by letting time carry us along with its flow. With this perpetual youth we have lost the marks and pleasure of age.

Ironically, though so much of the poem pretends to deny that his love ages, Donne's very purpose is to commemorate his first anniversary. In this celebration--and the acknowledgment of having reached a watershed imposed by the steady motion of time--Donne's proposition is undermined.

In Marvell we find, once again, a purposeful rendering of death and the contract between that which is alive and that which has lost the spark of life. Marvell chooses to concentrate on the corporal aspect of death, the sense of decay and the decimation of the body. This emphasis serves him well as he has primarily been concerned with the visible beauty of his mistress. Yet in Marvell's veering away from the subject of the soul (the dominant theme in *The Anniversary*) there appears to be tacit acknowledgment of the difference between the body and the soul. Marvell is away that he cannot argue with similar force if he chooses to notice the "higher faculties" in his poem.

It is to advance his argument that Marvell evaluates what are essentially abstract concepts in material terms. This is how virginity is reduced to the literal maidenhead, which serves to point out this cherished tissue's transitory nature. Similarly, the grave must be spoken of in terms of embraces to contract it with the warmth of a love shared when one is alive. All of which suggests that Marvell is adopting a rather skeptical view towards death here. It seems as if he has annul