

Andrew Marvell

The Complete Poems

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50 TO HIS COY MISTRESS

4
For Fate with jealous eye does see
Two perfect loves, nor lets them close:
Their union would her ruin be,
And her tyrannic power depose.

5
And therefore her decrees of steel
Us as the distant Poles have placed,
(Though Love's whole world on us doth wheel)
20 Not by themselves to be embraced,

6
Unless the giddy heaven fall,
And earth some new convulsion tear;
And, us to join, the world should all
Be cramped into a planisphere.

7
As lines (so loves) oblique may well
Themselves in every angle greet:
But ours so truly parallel,
Though infinite, can never meet.

8
Therefore the love which us doth bind,
30 But Fate so enviously debars,
Is the conjunction of the mind,
And opposition of the stars.

To His Coy Mistress

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. I would

51 TO HIS COY MISTRESS

Love you ten years before the flood:
And you should, if you please, refuse
10 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;
20 Nor would I love at lower rate.
But at my back I always hear
Time's wingèd 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 your quaint honour turn to dust;
30 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 glue
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,
40 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,
Thorough the iron grates of life.
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

43-4 *Hymeneus . . . for sad purple, tears his saffron coat* The god of marriage was traditionally garbed in a saffron robe and carried a nuptial torch; the purple pall was used both to denote persons of rank and to cover a coffin or a tomb. Hastings died on the eve of his marriage to a daughter of the King's physician Sir Theodore Turquet de Mayerne. See ll. 48 and 52.

47 *Aesculapius* the patron deity of medicine.

49 *chemist* an alchemist (cf. his 'golden harvest') as well as a follower of Paracelsus; a French Protestant, De Mayerne was early involved in a medical controversy in which, like Paracelsus, he championed the use of chemical remedies.

50 *leap* break.

60 *art . . . is long, but life is short* a dictum attributed to the celebrated Greek physician Hippocrates.

THE DEFINITION OF LOVE

First published in the Folio, this lyric falls into the category of 'definition' poems (see Rosemond Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*, pp. 301-2) with the emphasis not on defining love in general but on distinguishing the speaker's love in particular. Marvell's own explanation of 'definition' as a term in logic affords a witty application to stanza 8: 'it always consists, as being a dialectic animal, of a body which is the genus, and a difference, which is the soul of the thing defined' (*Defence of John Home*, Grosart IV, 183). It is also to be linked with 'absence' poems such as Donne's *A Valediction: forbidding Mourning*, Carew's *To My Mistress*:

Yet let our boundless spirits meet,
And in love's sphere each other greet (ll. 9-10),

and Lovelace's *To Lucasta, Going beyond the Seas*:

Our faith and troth
Like separated souls
All time and space controlls, (ll. 14-16),

but it exhibits Marvell's distinctive hyperbolic and paradoxical cast.

2 *object* both (a) that which excites the emotion and (b) objective.

5 *Magnanimous Despair* An oxymoron; *magnanimous* meaning resolute and qualifying *Despair* (without hope) is contrasted with *feeble Hope* of l. 7.

10 *my extended soul is fixed* *extended* means (a) directed to; (b) held out; and (c) possessing extension, a qualification of matter, not mind or soul, so that the phrase is also an oxymoron.

fixed (a) directed towards and (b) firmly established.

11 *But Fate does iron wedges drive* The *wedges* have been identified with the 'heavy nails and wedges' attributed by Horace to Necessity or Fate (*Carmina* I, 35. 17-18).

14 *close unite*.

15 *Their union would her ruin be* the union of the lovers in spite of the intervention of Fate would be to counter her powers and decrees (l. 17).

18-19 *Us as the distant Poles have placed, | (Though Love's whole world on us doth wheel)* Though by decree of Fate the lovers are as far apart as the two Poles, yet the world of Love whirls around the imaginary line ('the Axle-tree of Nature', *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, Smith, p. 230) extending between the Poles. Cf. the diction in *Tom May's Death*:

the wheel of empire whirlleth back,
And though the world's disjointed axle crack (ll. 67-8).

24 *Be cramped into a planisphere* *Planisphere* is a chart formed by the projection of a sphere onto a plane. The two Poles could come together only if the charted world were collapsed.

25 *lines . . . oblique* inclined at any angle (other than a right angle).

27 *parallel* (a) equidistant and (b) corresponding, which points to the 'conjunction of the mind' in l. 31.

31 *conjunction* (a) the coming together in the same sign of the zodiac of two heavenly bodies and (b) union.

32 *opposition of the stars* Opposition is the position of two heavenly bodies at diametrical opposites. Literally and metaphorically, the phrase means 'star-crossed'. Cf. 'Souls in conjunction should, like stars, send kind influence' (Edward Benlowes, *Theophila*, 1652, XII, 13).

TO HIS COY MISTRESS

This invitational lyric, cast in syllogistic form (If . . . But . . . Therefore), was first published in the Folio and should perhaps be grouped in time of composition with other examples of courtly lyrics. Using the ancient theme of *carpe diem*, the poet blends together a blazon, reduced to a bare arithmetical recital of the lady's beauties (ll. 13-18), with echoes of a Greek epigram (ll. 25-32) in proffering his invitation, which is stated in terms of a direct inversion of the equally ancient theme of *tempus edax* (ll. 38-44).

4 *long love's day* *Love's day* picks up two meanings of loveday, that is, a day devoted to love-making and a day designated for settling personal disputes; in either case, the specificity is in contrast to the conditional - geographical and temporal - expressed in l. 1. But the first two elements may also be read as a unit ('long-love's') indicating duration, in which case, in qualifying a short span of time, the phrase is an oxymoron.

6-7 *tide | Of Humber* Tide originally meant time (as in the reduplicative phrase 'time and tide'); then tide of the sea. Allusion to the Humber estuary in Yorkshire recalls the poet's residence at Hull.

8-10 *the flood* . . . *[the conversion of the Jews]* Though Biblical historians and millenarians could supply dates in the remote past and in the distant future for these two events, they fall within the literary convention of the catalogue of impossibilities (*adunata*). Roger Sharrock (*TLS* 31 October 1958; 16 January 1959) and E. E. Duncan-Jones (*TLS* 5 December 1958) suggest possible dates for the poem on the basis of these allusions.

11 *vegetable love* characterized only by growth (in accord with the doctrine of the three souls, vegetative, sensitive, and rational).

13-18 *And hundred years should go . . . [heart Cf. The Diet, stanza 3, from Cowley's Mistress (1647):*

On a sigh of pity I a year can live.
One tear will keep me twenty at least.
Fifty a gentle look will give,
An hundred years on one kind word I'll feast;
A thousand more will added be
If you an inclination have for me;
And all beyond is vast eternity.

24 *vast eternity* a popular phrase used, for example, by Herrick (*Eternity* in the *Hesperides*, 1648) and Benlowes (*Theophila*, 1652, V, 12) as well as by Cowley (see above).

25-30 *Thy beauty shall . . .* Leishman compares the epigram of Aesclepiades in the *Greek Anthology*, V, 85; 'Thou grudgest thy maidenhead? What avails it? When thou goest to Hades thou shalt find none to love thee there. The joys of love are in the land of the living, but in Acheron, dear virgin, we shall lie dust and ashes' (trans. W. R. Paton, Loeb Classical Library, 1916, I, 169).

29 *quaint honour* proud chastity (or reputation for it). Some editors find a pun by connecting the adjective *quaint* with the Middle English noun *queynte*: pudenda.

33 *glue*] *Eng. poet. d. 49*; hue *F.* It is to be noted that the reading *glue* (in this much debated couplet) appears in rhyme position in both *Eng. poet. d. 49* and in *F.* In the Folio, however, its transposition to l. 34 has resulted in a reading editors almost invariably have emended. Nonetheless, its appearance there attests to its presence in the manuscript used by the printer.

The reading given in *Eng. poet. d. 49* is also found in a short version of the lyric copied in 1672 (*Bod. MS. Don.b.8*, pp. 283-4, a miscellany compiled by Sir William Haward of Tanridge); this copy is discussed by W. Hilton Kelliher (*N & Q* CCXV, 1970, 254-6), who argues that despite obvious corruptions in the transcription, the poem was remembered with some accuracy.

Moreover, the sense of *youthful glue* is entirely consonant with the theme of the poem as the following quotation makes clear: 'Life is nothing else but as it were a glue, which in man fasteneth the soul and body together' (William Baldwin, *Moral Philosophy*, 1547, cited in the *OED*).

34 *dew*] *Eng. poet. d. 49*, Cooke + ; glue *F.* This reading, it should be noted, is also found in *Bod. MS. Don.b.8* (1672) referred to above.

40 *slow-chapped* slowly devouring; the noun *chap* is used in reference to a jaw or to a bill, particularly of a bird of prey, the latter probably suggested by 'amorous birds of prey', l. 38.

41-2 *roll all our strength, and all | Our sweetness up into one ball* This image of a concentration of properties is frequent in Benlowes's *Theophila* (see n. to l. 24), where he has 'universal ball'; 'time's ball'; and 'earth's ball' (VIII. 18; XII. 86, 93).

44 *grates*] *Eng. poet. d. 49*; gates *F.* The phrase 'iron gates' has come to have the ring of idiom from the popularity of the poem in its Folio version. Yet the variety of interpretation, ranging from the notion that the image suggests the reach of the Danube (Margoliouth) to metaphorical *labia* (Dennis Davison), points to its problematical basis and indicates a somewhat desperate search for signification.

In terms of literary tradition, the adjectives most commonly associated with gates are *horn* and *ivory*, whereas *iron* is commonly used with *grates* (see *OED*). Moreover, the traditional figurative phrase was 'gates of death' (*mortis januae*) not 'gates of life'. Used both in Roman times and in England from the time of Wycliffe, the phrase became proverbial in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. See Tilley D140 and D162.

The one literary example I know that specifies a 'gate' into life (as well as death) is found in Spenser's account of the Garden of Adonis (*F Q* III, vi, 31-2). Here the poet describes a cyclical process where a 'thousand thousand naked babes' issue from the Garden into a state of mortality and then return to the Garden by a 'hinder gate' to 'grow afresh'. The Garden is described as girt in with 'two walles on either side', the 'one of yron, the other of bright gold'.

And double gates it had, which opened wide,
By which both in and out men moten pas;
Th' one faire and fresh, the other old and dride.

The adjectives describing the double gates in this circular wall, one notes, accord with the condition of the men who pass through them. The gate in the 'bright gold' wall is 'faire and fresh' to accord with the condition of the 'naked babes' who exit from it, while that in the iron wall is 'old and dride' to accord with their condition on re-entry into the Garden. Thus in Spenser's scheme the gate into life is gold (whatever the 'fleshy corruptions' that ensue); the gate into death is iron.

One may also recall Tennyson's comment that he could fancy *grates* would have intensified Marvell's image (Hallam Tennyson, *Tennyson, A Memoir*, 1897, II, 501).

45-6 *we cannot make our sun | Stand still* as Joshua did in the war against Gibeon (*Joshua*, x 12). See the explicit use of this allusion in *A Poem upon the Death of . . . the Lord Protector*, ll. 191-2.

46 *yet we will make him run* Perhaps suggested by i 5 in Ecclesiastes, a book in which the *carpe diem* motif figures largely (see especially ix 7-12): 'The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth [literally 'pants'] to the place where he arose.'

EYES AND TEARS

In the convention of 'tear poetry', this lyric, first published in the Folio, links up with other examples of the conceited, argumentative strain of poetry that developed with the Counter-Reformation. Crashaw's *Saint Mary Magdalen or The Weeper* (first published in 1646, altered and extended in 1648 and 1652) is often suggested as the impetus for *Eyes and Tears*, but Marvell focuses on the more general proposition that since weeping is the inevitable result of seeing, it is therefore a superior activity (a kind of *post hoc ergo propter hoc* argument); the allusion to the Magdalen (stanza 8) is thus only one among a number of ingenious examples introduced to demonstrate this point. A manuscript copy in *Bod. Tanner 306*, which is ascribed to Marvell, shows minor variants and omits stanza 9.

3 *having viewed the object vain* a syntactical pun with *vain* used as an adjective meaning empty or futile or as an adverb (vainly, as in 'these roses strewed so plain', l. 21, *A Dialogue, between the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure*); cf. also the 'self-deluding sight' of l. 5.

4 *We*] *Eng. poet. d. 49, Tanner 306; They F.*

5 *Thus*] *Eng. poet. d. 49; And F, Tanner 306.*

5-6 *the self-deluding sight, | In a false angle takes each height* Cf.:

The tree erewhile foreshortened to our view,
When fall'n shows taller yet than as it grew (*A Poem upon the Death of . . . the Lord Protector*, ll. 269-70).

11 *poise* balance.

20 *No honey but these tears, could draw* could elicit no honey (a) except these tears (b) only these tears.

22 *chemic* alchemic.

23 *But finds the essence only show'rs* The verb 'is' understood. The alchemists used the term *essence* for the fifth essence (quintessence), which they believed was capable of being distilled.

29-32 *So Magdalen . . . her Redeemer's feet* The Latin version of this stanza was appended in 1681; see ll. 57-60, and translation below.

35 *Cynthia teeming* the moon at full. *Eng. poet. d. 49* reads *seeming*.

41-2 *the incense . . . | Not as a perfume* Cf.

The tears do come
Sad, slowly dropping like a gum.
So weeps the wounded balsam: so
The holy frankincense doth flow (*The Nymph Complaining*, ll. 95-8).

48 *But only human eyes can weep* The Nymph's fawn (as Margoliouth notes) is capable of doing so, see *The Nymph Complaining*, l. 95.

57-60 *Magdala . . . pedes*

Thus, when Magdalene dismissed her wanton lovers
And dissolved her sultry eyes into chaste waters,
Christ stood fixed in a flowing bond of tears,
His sacred feet held in a liquid chain.

THE CORONET

As a lyric in the religious pastoral mode, *The Coronet*, first published in the Folio, shows a thematic and generic link with the early dialogue *Thyrsis and Dorinda* and with *Clorinda and Damon*; this offers the only clue to its date of composition. Although Herbert's *The Wreath* provides an analogue, the diction of the poem, particularly in ll. 14 and 22, suggests that Marvell had also been reading in the sixteenth-century poets. Its convoluted style and tortuous syntax serve to suit the manner to the matter.

7 *towers* high headdresses.

14 *twining in* entwining.

speckled breast from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, I. xi. 15.

15 *fold* wind.

16 *wreaths* coils.

22 *curious fame* ingenious structure (the chaplet), a phrase taken from Sidney's Sonnet 28 in *Astrophel and Stella* where it is applied derisively to allegory; the borrowing lends support to the interpretation of the coronet as a metaphorical garland of poetry.

23 *these* flowers, understood here and in the next line.
so that provided that.

25 *spoils* (a) sloughing of a snake's skin and (b) plundering.