Marvell S To His Coy Mistress And Donne S Flea Essay, Research Paper

The seventeenth century was an era of beautiful poetry. Two poets in particular, Andrew Marvell and John Donne, wrote carpe diem poetry full of vivid imagery and metaphysical conceits. Each conveyed the message of living for the now. This message can be clearly seen in the poems To his Coy Mistress by Marvell and Donne s Flea. By using clever metaphors and meter, the poems not only are symbolic, but have almost a physical aspect to them. Though both poems take a similar approach, it is Marvell that writes the more persuasive one, reaching deep into the soul to win his object of affection.

The main theme of Marvell s poem is to seize the day. The speaker is trying to convince the woman that it is much better to have sex now than to save her virginity for the future. The man wants to experience the pleasure now, while the woman would rather save herself until they are married. Marvell s message here seems to be that we shouldn t be worrying so much about exactly when and where to do things, but just to take things as they come and enjoy them. This theme relates to all aspects of life, not just sex.

The rhyme scheme follows a standard AA, BB, CC, etc., couplet pattern. A few of the lines are irregular however. Lines 23 and 24 rhyme lie with eternity, and lines 27 and 28 rhyme try with virginity. It is interesting to not that lie rhymes with try, just as eternity rhymes with virginity. Marvell used this technique to change up the systemic flow of the rest of the poem. By highlighting these two couplets, the symbolism of those lines strikes the reader with greater impact than the rest of the poem. Images of deserts of vast eternity and virginity together instill the idea that it will be hard to

prolong virginity, and it would be better to give in now.

The poem is mostly written in iambic tetrameter, and flows softly and easily, much like a nursery rhyme. All the lines do not conform to the same format, however. While most lines contain eight syllables, some have more. Line 27 uses nine syllables, as does line 38. The switching of the meter keeps the reader on edge, and never lets the poem slip into a monotonous cycle. Not only does this technique keep the reader on its toes, but also symbolizes the spontaneous thought of the narrator, who lives very whimsically.

Marvell uses spondaic meter as well as iambic. Shall sound, the last two words of line 26, are both stressed. Rough Strife, the last words of line 43, are also both stressed. The use of spondee helps to switch up the tempo of the poem and also fits the context of the lines. Lines 39-41 deal with time:

Rather at once our time devour,

Than languish in his slow-chapped power.

Let us roll all our strength and all

These lines actually produce the effect of slowing time down. Languish in his slow-chapped power rolls off of the tongue and takes effort to say. When spoken out-loud, the line reads almost as if it were in slow motion. Line 41 is almost entirely composed of stressed feet, requiring the reader to speak slowly as well. All of this speeding up and slowing down creates a roller coaster of rhythm, showing off more of the impromptu style with which the narrator exhibits.

The language and metaphors uses in the poem range from the obvious to the

hidden. Line 8 reads I would love you ten years before the flood, most likely

signifying that he will love her through thick and thin. The flood most likely has a

religious connotation, though it is unknown which flood he is referring to. Other uses of simile can be seen in line 38, in which he compares himself and the woman to amorous birds of prey. This notion is intended to try to convince the woman to listen to her more wanton side, and submit to her desires. Marvell occasionally utilizes personification, proceeding to talk of the narrator s vegetable love. While it is not entirely clear what Marvell meant by this, it can be interpreted as a love that grows slowly and deeply, just as a vegetable would.

To his Coy Mistress is similar in many ways to Donne s Flea. The speakers of both poems are trying to sleep with a woman by convincing them that it is the right thing to do. Donne uses the metaphysical conceit of a flea to symbolize the love shared between them. By comparing the blood union in the flea to sexual intercourse, the narrator illustrates that it is not such a big deal. When the woman kills the flea, she kills the bond between them. But the narrator stays determined, and proceeds to show how insignificant sex is, just as it was so to kill the flea.

Donne also uses iambic tetrameter in the AA, BB, CC, etc., form. The poem is shorter than To his Coy Mistress, and does not contain the as many creative uses of diction and rhyme scheme. The conceit of the flea is a more creative approach to the subject than simply stating the case, but the idea is more far-fetched, and runs almost to the point of annoyance. Though wonderful as poetry, in terms of persuasiveness, it fails when compared to the eloquence of Marvell s speaker. With such ingenious rhyme, use of metaphors, and vivid imagery, To his Coy Mistress exemplifies one man s raw desire and passion, and refusal to be denied.