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Reversible Space, Linear Time: Andrew Marvell's "Bermudas"

Andrew Marvell's lyrics characteristically fuse contradictory tropes or themes; as Graham Parry observes in a recent survey, his persistent pattern is to write poems "concerned with setting some quality or person or idea in balanced opposition to another, and there is often a sense of divided loyalties or alternative ways of action." For Parry, this tendency is particularly evident in "Bermudas," which not only fuses alternate qualities or ideas but Marvell's two most fundamentally opposed genres, "the garden interest with the radical religious strain."¹ However, critics of the pastoral poems have not generally asked themselves what unites these two strains, tending instead to isolate the Marvell given to detached Neoplatonic meditation from his radical Puritan alterego.² What then emerges is a reflective pastoralist in retreat from worldly commitment, a master practitioner of aesthetic ambiguity. In this view, the generic tensions of Marvell's lyric style contribute to its philosophic but not to its political refinement. Earl Miner, for instance, concludes that

what Cowley separated into different styles Marvell brought back together again, as it were, in a mixed style. Marvell's poetry has not indeed the passionate immediacy of Donne's . . . but he does possess a lightness of thought and a fineness of shading between thought and thought and between thought and feeling that is unrivalled in his sphere.³

Miner's view is in general a reasonable one. It recognizes that having mixed affiliations, poetic or political, is hardly equivalent to having none; and like Parry, Miner finds in Marvell a poet divided between "the Metaphysical directness of commitment" and "Cavalier disengagement."⁴ This general approach becomes problematic, however, in that when the dual impulses of commitment and disengagement are made objects of a specifically *poetic* concern, they all too easily dissolve into a unitary affinity with aesthetic

irony and ambiguity. In this case the lyrics are reduced to academic exercises in alternate states of consciousness, or what amounts to the same thing, withdrawals into a graceful meditation far removed from religious or political responsibility: "a poise of meanings scarcely to be resolved."

With the exception of Margarita Stocker's recent emphatically political interpretation of the poem, most readings of Marvell's "Bermudas" have subscribed to some version of the ironic meditation formula that its contradictions seem to imply. Any concrete direction which might be attributed to the sailors on the "*English boat*"⁶ thus recedes before the process of meditative reflection. Rosalie Colie, for instance, finds that their destination "must be, like Eden and like Marvell's other Garden, a state of mind rather than the specific island of Captain John Smith or of Lewis Hughes."⁷ Here Platonic contemplation subverts engagement, not only annihilating all into "a green Thought in a green Shade," but fixing this shade in an eternal landscape which reveals that such "earthly paradises are always static."⁸ Colie's interpretation of the poem has been particularly influential in allowing the engaged Puritan poet to disappear, and in his place to reappear his quietistic counterpart, the reflective philosopher. Nor is this substitution surprising, considering the importance of the New Critics in drawing attention to Marvell as the paradigmatic poet of the ironic vision, a vision implicitly sympathetic to their valorization of the private sphere.

Another factor behind this emphasis on the element of philosophical contemplation in the lyrics is Marvell's long standing association with the Metaphysical poets, a generic group whose definition has itself been notoriously ambiguous. In any case, specifically Neoplatonic or more generally New Critical or Metaphysical approaches to the lyrics are mutually reinforcing, since all would place them squarely within the private and contemplative mode. Miner, for instance, describes the Metaphysicals as poets who, largely for personal reasons, "protested with satire against social myth and ritual" and "rejected eloquence in favor of natural language."⁹ However, this definition must be questioned for at least two reasons: 1) in the Reformation, a protest against "social myth and ritual" could scarcely be regarded as a purely private matter, since it meant taking a stand on either the Cavalier or Puritan sides of a national controversy with enormous personal and religious implications; and 2) "eloquence" and "natural language," if they can be opposed at all, are opposed by Miner in a way that implicitly refutes the acknowledged reliance of Metaphysical poetry upon the conceit. John Crowe Ransom's classic essay on the subject in fact presents the contrary view that the conceit is pointedly anti-naturalistic, a device which employs "miraculism" as a corrective to the

fact that "Platonic poetry is too idealistic, but physical poetry is too realistic, and realism is tedious and does not maintain interest." The function of metaphysical language is therefore not to conclude a naturalistic "act of attention" but, eloquently, to initiate one.¹⁰

If the general interpretation of Marvell's lyrics has leaned too heavily toward the aesthetic, metaphysical and therefore private Puritan poet, a corrective strategy would then seem to be to rehabilitate the engaged social and religious revolutionary lurking somewhere beneath the surface of the lyrics. However, the attempts so far made in this direction have unfortunately tended toward the extreme of erasing the meditative Marvell completely. As Margarita Stocker interprets the "Bermudas," the experience of its Puritan sailors should be seen as announcing "A Revelation for the Revolution": "when here the English mariners row in concert to bring the Ship of State to its destination, it is an image of the unity necessary to the renovating effort." Although aesthetic elements do not exactly disappear in Stocker's work, they are effectively taken over by religious and political expectations; hence, "eschatological desire is captured in the fragile image of the beauty as well as the price of apocalypse."¹¹ Here the poem's notable dichotomies are once more subsumed by unitary drives, in this case apocalyptic rather than meditative and Neoplatonic, but again by a relatively limited—that is, static or closed—vision of Paradise. Frank Kermode differs from the norm in attempting to retain some sense of these dichotomies in his reading of Marvell's garden poems, which he sees as two types of Platonism set against each other as genre to anti-genre;¹² but no one has so far proposed reading his pastorals as containing two opposed genres *apart from* the sphere of Marvell's philosophic disengagement, and *between* it and his Puritan commitment. Such a view would maintain his poetic dichotomies without erasing either the nostalgia which he feels for an earlier "candid age" characterized by relatively circumscribed social and aesthetic codes,¹³ or his attraction to its antithesis, the salvational paradise of post-apocalyptic, Puritan Eden/England.

The problem attendant upon reading the pastorals as including two opposed world views is that these views imply not merely dual but actually antithetical models of cosmic order. As William Madsen has noted, along with its religious and political program, Puritanism incorporated radically different concepts of space and time than those of an earlier Christian tradition whose roots were generally Greek and Neoplatonic. He describes the shift as follows:

In Greek thought the emphasis is on the present, the Eternal Now which bodies forth the rational structure of the uni-

verse. In Hebrew thought the emphasis is on history as the embodiment of God's purpose, and history is especially the record of those specific times in which God communicated with man in a special way. The past and the future thus assume an importance they do not have in classicism.

. . . The Reformation . . . leans to the Hebrew view: history, both corporate and individual, assumes more importance, and the idea of personal encounter with God and of a covenant with Him replaces the idea of a daily reenactment of the eternal Incarnation. The physical church is no longer the scene in which the eternal drama is present; it is the actual meeting place where men come together to hear the Word of God.¹⁴

Thus for Protestants, the word and its interpretation replace a ritual reenactment whose role is to unite sacred space with eternal time. Since the church no longer provides the connection between the believer and a stable dimension of truth above him, one capable of returning him *in illo tempore*, the imaginative horizons of eternal truth are now no longer vertical but horizontal. The pilgrim no longer looks upward to an eternal revelation of the Word, but instead looks outward to its approaching *parousia* at the Last Day.

These imaginative shifts in the dimensions of word, space and time have profound psychological consequences for individual believers, who may now inhabit almost completely disparate mental universes. Joan Webber provides a convenient synopsis of some of the more striking differences between the conservative Anglican "I" and the radical Puritan "I" in the following passage:

The conservative "I" is meditative, anti-historical, obscure and ambiguous, symbolic. He lives upon the inheritance of the Anglican past, sustaining and sustained by it. Time for him is an aspect of eternity; there is nothing new under the sun; every man is like Adam, who contained all. The typically Anglican metaphor of man as a little world is predominant in the conservative's self-analysis. Overcoming space and time, this symbol can unify the shared experience of the race.

. . . At the opposite extreme from the conservative, the radical "I" is active, timebound, as simple and visible as possible, desirous of being taken literally as a man living in a hostile world. Instead of beginning with Man, he begins with

himself; instead of beginning with generalizations, he begins with concrete details. Where the conservative prefers poetry, he prefers history, and in current events he finds his place in life. His spiritual self-exploration is always temporal.¹⁵

In general, we can say that the conservative Anglican experiences time in the "now," the Puritan in the concrete connections between past and future, so that, as Webber goes on to demonstrate, any mediation between these genres must compound the formal difficulties inherent in each. As an example she cites Richard Baxter, who "demonstrates, in fact, how perilous and self-denying a task it can be for an artist to attempt to inter-mediate, to interpret, to stand between two different ideologies or styles."¹⁶

It would be tempting to view Marveil's lyrics as poetic parallels to Baxter's prose, the products of a synthetic voice in whom two radically different perceptions confront each other. However, the ambiguous vision of "Bermudas" appears to chart not merely a dialectic between two conflicting ideologies, but also its own idiosyncratic redemption, a miraculous journey concrete in a typically Puritan sense, yet at the same time unresolved in a sense uniquely Marvellian. While its course through symbolic time combines elements of both the eternally recurring Anglican "now" and the concretely deferred "then" of the Puritan Apocalypse, the insistent direction of its song is westward, in the direction of Providence.¹⁷ Ambiguous and shifting yet also relentlessly horizontal, this journey takes place in a symbolic medium that would seem to block as much as to initiate generic synthesis. One major aspect of this blockage, however, is more apparent than real; as Thomas Luxon points out, even a prototypically Puritan journey like that of Bunyan's Christian reflects tension and ambiguity *along with* concreteness and linearity. Protestant theologians and poets of the period alike were divided over the use of images and emblems in descriptive language, because their aesthetic "logocentricism" was essentially at odds with their need to create metaphors capable of communicating Christian experience. Although Protestants distinguished between the elementary authority of words and things, and outer forms were typically more suspect than inner realities, the latter were themselves dependent upon a partially visual, partially spiritual understanding of the Word. Thus in contrast to Webber's generally valid but somewhat schematic summary of Puritan consciousness, Luxon finds that *Pilgrim's Progress* resolves the problem of uniting the inner voice with the visual object by creating a third category, that of temporal experience:

Experience of the Word is the final goal in Interpreter's House; interpretation is merely the first step on the way to

the goal. Interpretation of the things of experience in the light of the Word gradually leads Christian to an entirely new experience generated out of the Word itself. The words of the Word and the images of the Word become fused in experience.¹⁸

In "Bermudas," a similar set of dichotomies appears; not between word and image, but between the related categories of seeing and hearing. In this case a fusion of oppositions is not accomplished by a Bunyanesque exaltation of experience, but by its more elusive parallel: a less concrete, but still quasi-miraculous, future-oriented vision of the linear progress of time. This form of resolution, moreover, would seem wholly appropriate to a poet who, as Parry remarks, "believed in the providential nature of history, that history was a manifestation of God's purposes for men, and that ever since the Reformation, God's hand had been increasingly visible as he went about the purifying of religion and the promotion of his favoured nations in preparation for the last age of the world."¹⁹ Thus Marvell's literary sensibility, if aesthetically far more sophisticated than Bunyan's, can be interpreted as evincing a similar religious and political disposition; an attempt not merely to balance disparate modes of perception, but gradually to sift and reorient them in the direction of a definite if not wholly definable end. If ambiguities remain in the lyric sense of place, these are generally subsumed by the linearity of its time. Hence as "Bermudas" concludes, its song is initially echoed vertically up to heaven, but is finally deflected horizontally out "beyond the *Mexique Bay*" (36). And if some residual ambiguity attached to the islands' spatial location is retained in the temporal experience of the sailors, this experience, like their journey, retains the strong thrust of providential history.

In this dynamic experience neither balanced oppositions nor the linear direction of temporal experience are subject to erasure; one of Marvell's more remarkable achievements as a poet is that both elements pointedly coexist. Even Bruce King, who along with Stocker interprets the poem as an expression of apocalyptic closure in which "Time, space and perspective are dislocated . . . as a means of focusing upon symbols," is forced to note the troubling questions which must pose themselves to the reflective reader: "Are the voyagers on their way to the Bermudas, or have they already discovered it? Why do they appear to be singing as if they were already there, about a place to which they are still voyaging?"²⁰ To this list he further adds the poem's notorious confusion of verb tenses. Although some of these questions may be partially resolved by noting that the mariner's boat, which is not a sailing *ship*, could well be rowing around

the island instead of to or from the mainland, the fact that its position remains mysteriously detached from the islands or from any clearly defined function only adds to the other aspects of the poem which fail to achieve the strong resolution the apocalyptic critics claim to find. In addition to the boat, its voyagers, and the verbs which describe them, the islands themselves resist inclusion in any specific, let alone fixed, future tense, since they "appear" only in the wind-borne words of the sailors' song. These problematic ambiguities remove the poem from the kind of emblematic stability which would convincingly identify the Bermudas with the Puritan corollary of the Eternal Now, the completed New Jerusalem experienced at the end of time.

This analysis of the aesthetic paths by which Marvell fuses disparate genres in order to redirect them toward Protestant experience, a reorientation which will *eventually* validate experience over interpretation, providential history over eternity, expansion over meditation, and the New World over the Old, *but not quite yet*, at this point needs a more specific definition of terms. Temporal distinctions between linear and circular, historical and eternal time are already familiar in our vocabulary, but it is more difficult to observe a similar set of spatial oppositions for which no standard terms exist. Hence, since Marvell's "Bermudas" exhibits a double space that relentlessly alternates and recycles its positions, I have chosen to appropriate and adapt a term used by Claude Levi-Strauss for alternating, cyclical time, which he describes as "reversible time." By analogy, then, the dual and cyclically alternating space of "Bermudas" can be described as "reversible space," concerning which we can now observe a curious conceptual anomaly: Marvell, the Puritan poet, resists the lure of the classic mythical concept of reversible time²¹ only to succumb to the mysterious metaphysics of reversible space. Since the Eternal Now of the sacred garden has disappeared, a compensation is supplied by the curiously folding and reenfolding dimensions of this space, one which is neither progressive nor static, neither fully Platonic nor fully apocalyptic, but at once both and neither: dual, alternating, ambiguous modes that accommodate each other even as they remain distinct from the relentless progress of linear time.

Dual images are apparent from the very opening of "Bermudas." Not only does the poem's frame disengage itself from its subject in style, content, and setting, but its ostensible object, the islands themselves, is alternately revealed through the dual mediums of verbal icon and verbal music, picture and song. The dominant function of reversible space is, in fact, to displace, invert, and exchange terms like "seeing" and "hearing," picture

and song, related or reciprocal perceptual modes which are not interchangeable, categories of experience that must remain distinct. Its typical process is to replace one term with its mirror image, at once its paradoxical twin and its inverse, its opposite. To complete the cycle these doubles again exchange places so that what is seen disappears and what is heard appears. As a result, "Bermudas" gives the impression of being an optical illusion as well as a poem, or aural illusion; its indeterminate status as a tropical puzzle in space is resolved only as it is transformed finally into a topological puzzle in time.

The first four lines of the poem illustrate its animating process. In this introduction to reversible space we find Marvell's poetic sleight-of-hand inverting the standard use of oxymoron, replacing nouns with predicates in the formation of verbal paradoxes:

Where the remote *Bermudas* ride
 In th' Oceans bosome unespy'd,
 From a small Boat, that row'd along,
 The listning Winds receiv'd this Song.

The Bermudas, like the boat, *ride* on the waves; at the same time, the island, the boat's apparent objective, sits "in th' Ocean's bosome unespy'd." The island which one expects to appear remains *unseen*, experienced only through the voices in the boat that issue their song to the "listning Winds." Yet even this reversal of the normative roles of hearing and seeing is unstable, itself reversed as we discover that the boat, described as the source of both the song and of "seeing," is never described or even situated in respect to land. Simply the "*English* boat," where it is going in relation to the Bermudas remains unspecified. Since neither its size nor its role in relation to the island can be defined, coming and going, like the poem's verb tenses, remain hopelessly confused here as throughout the song; the boat which is supposed to connect the listener to its source keeps retreating into the distance.

Similarly, where or when the experience of the Bermudas is located can only be related by the singers on the boat, singers who never distinctly either leave or enter the island and who are themselves unidentifiable. They frame the island journey at the same time that they indirectly participate in it, but they never reach it. These descriptive markers continue to mirror and deflect each other, finally managing to complete a full reversal of positions once the poem, now embarked, sets itself fully in motion. At this point its short lines and the strong, rhythmic strokes of its verse suggest that it is now the boat that is *heard* rather than seen, while the island which the frame

implied was "unespy'd" emerges in a complexly detailed picture by means of the sailors' song. The transference or displacement from one element to the other has been made complete, yet these elements, while becoming interchangeable, never blend. Hearing and seeing, song and vision, like the island and the nearby boat, float side by side.

The content of the sailors' song reflects still other and more intricate aspects of reversible space. In its capacity *as* song, a hymn of "an holy and a chearful Note," both its use of the lyric medium and lyric voice are problematic. Neither its tone nor the identity of its implied speaker(s) can be clearly specified; as lyric song it lacks a traditional style or rhythm, and although it rhymes, it has neither the hypnotic quality of a chant nor the swelling tonal structure of a hymn. Ballad-like and factual, it seems at times more a report than a sacred melody. Similarly, although it has the immediacy of implied poetic speakers, these speakers remain almost completely anonymous, as in many ways their subject does. Tensions exist not only between the details of the song, which are intimate and particular rather than abstract and universal, but also between its source and destination. Both the "island of our own" and the "storms and Prelat's rage" from which the deity saves and for which rescue he is blessed seem to have been experienced at some point in time, but both the time and the "us" have disappeared from the narrative. What emotion the speakers do experience appears within the context of their pictorial representation of the Bermudas rather than through the medium of either lyric voice or religious diction. Poetry, normally the linguistic equivalent of hearing, is translated almost wholly into pictorial emblems of seeing, emblems depicting deliverance and beatitude. At this stage the signifier, or metaphoric medium, and the signified or referential medium, split; content is not reflected *in*, but substitutes *for* form. Emblems act as song. Later, predictably, the process will reverse, and form will obliterate content as the island and the song representing it lapse into reversible space, while its boat sails away into linear time.

Before this happens, however, the symbolic elements which are the apparent content of the song themselves split into two paradoxical sets of emblems that produce two distinct allegories. Here the song which had seemed a single picture now appears as two separate visions, a naturalistic vision which emphasizes seeing, and a transcendental vision that emphasizes hearing God's word. The first presents a garden-island paradise of the natural/divine or pantheistic order, while the second presents a theological paradise, a reproduced Kingdom of God or second Jerusalem. Like the parallel duality of signifier and signified, these contradictory versions of Edenic

spatio-temporal closure, one pre-Edenic and one post-Edenic, exist in a fundamental tension not only with each other but finally also with linear time.

The first Bermuda in terms of time, the garden island-paradise which exists before and outside of time, is structured by a Neoplatonic space in which becoming is dynamically related to an immanent sense of being or form. The activity of its underlying Being is implied from the very arrival of the absent "us" on to the island; he—who has no name throughout the poem—"lands us on a grassy Stage" (12). In this sacred/secular haven from the "watry Maze," grass becomes a stage where nature comes into a life of its own, acts roles. Not only this but a whole series of subsequent natural metaphors are animated with an activity belonging not to a transcendent deity, a Yahweh, but to an immanent naturalistic force who gives everything and proclaims everything while remaining absent. He is nevertheless able to maintain an organic and participatory relationship to his island creation because he himself appears to be the ultimate form of its content. He speaks in providential terms through matter rather than spirit, through nature rather than by divine decree. Thus he makes the seas to proclaim ambergris, brings figs to the mouth and casts melons at the feet of the inhabitants; in this section of the twinned allegories, deity appears not as a creator God of storm and lightning but as a Dionysian demiurge of pomegranates and enamelled Spring.²² While the natural world testifies to the primacy of his creative force, this version of Eden takes on a self-perpetuating creativity in itself divine. Fowls visit, seas proclaim, and apples are born on trees which, like humans, bring forth only one offspring at a time. Significantly, *this* garden's apple is not the product of the death-dealing tree which in the other Eden hung its ominous boughs of fruit above the human head, proleptic symbols of their deficiency and debt, but pineapples which grow at their feet, a plant *without* a price. Here sexuality, such a problem in the other garden, has been replaced by the spontaneous generation of pomegranates and figs, symbols of male and female in vegetable innocence, perhaps enjoying the fruits of what, in "To His Coy Mistress," the speaker wryly praises as "vegetable Love" (11).

The second image of deity present on the island occupies another and, as it were, superimposed plane of time and space in the song. This deity, like the Neoplatonic demiurge, is absent in name but present in an alternate set of metaphors and emblems. Against the tendency to experience the island in the mode of reversed metamorphosis—reversed in the sense that instead of humans transforming into natural/divine objects, nature becomes human/divine—an antithetical Garden and creator are projected.

The creator is now an Old Testament deity who acts not so much *through* the natural order as by transforming or intervening *in* it in order to produce history, his quintessential medium. Yahweh creates matter before history, but his real creation, as far as his human subjects are concerned, is Time. Time in this scale of experience is conceived as a series of messages or instructions delivered in order to construct the new Eden, so that the Word of this God and the form of *its* content, God's temple, form the alternate allegory of the experience of "Bermudas." In so doing, the acts of this deity reverse those of the immanent, dynamic being who speaks Nature; his "voice" delivers chronology and finally eschatology, the end of time in a new space, the New Jerusalem. He speaks neither in ambergris nor in any other scent, but casts "The Gospels Pearl upon our Coast" (30). His Name is founded on the rock of his Temple, prophetically revealed and sealed in the island's "frame" (31), but not uttered. Yet his omnipresence is at least equal to that of the demiurge, since the deliverance of his temple has been signalled from the very opening of the sailors' song, which credits him with their salvation from "the watry maze" and the Leviathan-like Sea-Monsters.

These allusions point to Christian typology, to the New Testament fulfillment of Old Testament prophetic types. The defeat of Leviathan suggests not only Jonah's deliverance, but Christ's victory over the tomb, his reproduction of the "sign of Jonah" (Matt. 12:39,40). After three days in darkness Christ rises to the eternal Spring, eternal life which, cast in human terms, can be located only in a new heaven and a new earth, or here, in the new Eden of Bermuda. In this interpretation of the island, its fowls become doves who represent daily visits of the holy spirit, while the oranges which hang "Like golden Lamps in a green Night" (18) stand for the golden lampstands of St. John's Revelation. In this allegory, then, metamorphosis is countered by transubstantiation, and the dynamism of the garden exists only to construct a naturalized Temple from perfected materials—Cedars of Lebanon, natural gold and incense, symbols of a progressive revelation to be achieved at the end of time.

This allegory of an apocalyptic fulfillment where types are no longer shadows but existential truths, spiritual essences are reembodied in natural forms, and pre-Eden vanishes into post-Eden, remains, however, only one self-cancelling plane of Marvell's reversible space. Its allegorical instability is signalled not only by its disappearance in the concluding frame of the poem, but also in the subjunctive mood in which the last lines of the song are cast. (*Italics added, except for Mexique Bay.*)

Oh let our Voice his Praise exact,
 Till it arrive at Heavens Vault:
 Which thence (*perhaps*) rebounding, *may*
 Echo beyond the *Mexique Bay*. (33–36)

At this point the poem retreats from closure and reactivates its every paradox. While at first the song strives upward to heaven, it finally rebounds out “beyond the Mexique Bay”—seeking the horizon of a wilderness with at most a narrowly confined allegorical potential. Yet here another element takes over and pushes the song beyond its generic resistance to closure, toward the providential time that must eventually (but can now only subjunctively) unite the planet. Space, having become reversible, performs a predictable alternation, but even this unstable form of eternal recurrence is undermined by a time which has no permanent, but only an evolving, relationship to space.

Time, as the accumulation of action and events, thus seems to represent the final instability at work in the poem. Its undetermined chain of experience defers providential meaning until the Last Judgement, an event which can exist in relation to the present only as a “beyond.” Linear time, here an abstract principle like the concept of merit in *Paradise Lost*, tends to empty “. . . hierarchy of real content, creating in its stead an empirical chaos of phenomena which must then be made to exhibit order by appeal to law existing independently of the chaos it explains.”²³ Marvell’s resistance to this emptying of hierarchy or place—and by extension sacred space—of meaningful content, is evidently much greater than Milton’s. His chaos, in contrast to the Miltonic variant described above by Carroll Cox, is on the one hand constrained by the predictable alterations of reversible space, and on the other, by its abstract law, the judgement of time, which is less clearly defined than Milton’s “merit”; it thus serves a largely metaphorical rather than a rhetorical or persuasive purpose.²⁴ Yet the alternating spaces of “Bermudas” fall finally within the Puritan experience; serving as no more than a wistful allusion to the stabilities of the Neoplatonic order, its allusions finally become illusions in their inability to resist duality and solidify into a unified exemplum, to construct a microcosm capable of unfolding the divine macrocosm. Linear time further intrudes into the self-cancelling circulation of reversible space, eroding even the partial stability of its mirror effects and using their very discontinuities to fuel its horizontal progress. At some vanishing point of the allegorically ambiguous cycle of perception the song finally disappears, and we are returned to

the world of the introductory frame, somewhere at sea in an English boat, singing a song already becoming a silence. What has appeared in the hymn's vision disappears beyond the world it pictured. The dynamic tension in the poem's dual, alternating and reversible cycles has now become fully circular and self-cancelling, leaving only the disappearing progress of the boat across the ocean, the expanse of time. There is no place or speech which can contain the oppositions of its visual music and its verbal icons.

In "Bermudas" Marvell performs a meditation on the condition of language beyond words, in the mysteries of the Platonic garden; and on the condition of vision only producible in words, in the emblematic signs of the Temple founded upon the Rock, the poetic space of the renovated Church. These tensions produce the vividly realized dichotomies and auditory/visual reversals which persist throughout the poem. Yet while the reader appears to end where he/she began, the destination of reversible space is not cyclical; the force of its oppositions propels the verbal image horizontally into an ever-retreating "beyond," beyond the Mexique Bay, beyond the boat, beyond its own utterance, an utterance itself vanishing in time. The final line of the poem, "With falling Oars they kept the time," echoes and rebounds against itself, disorienting our sense of space and re-orienting our sense of time as we depart from its retreating frame. After all, what is it to "keep the time"? To keep musical time, to keep in rowing time, to keep the spirit of this time, or to retain a continuous existence in a problematic time, time imaged by the rhythmic repetitions of oars over ocean waves, waves that after all carry a boat *somewhere*, perhaps to redeem the time? Has this boat at last conveyed us through a poem about paradise or about its redeemed type, the New Jerusalem, or are both merely poetic figurations of time, a time which has no proper space except in the poem, where it tentatively begins and ends? If time's other shape is relentless, carrying us horizontally beyond the horizon, how can it be located at all: where *is* time, and how can we identify it as either inside or outside of us, as the form or content of our experience? For Marvell, it would seem, the answer to these questions can be revealed only in the future tense, a tense outside his poem.

Further questions, however, remain. The most urgent of these concerns the role of "Bermudas" as a paradigm for Marvell's poetry particularly and Protestant poetry generally. How standard is the movement, outlined above, which takes the reader through two opposing conditions, two gardens or two relations to the world (as, for instance, the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*), and resolves these only by reference to experiential,

linear time? Is this standard for Marvell's pastoral mode; for other Protestant poets of the period; or for that ill-defined group, the Metaphysical poets? Certainly this formula could be seen as confirming Ransom's theory of the "initiatory" role of the conceit in metaphysical poetry, but does this hold true for other aspects of the genre? Only further research can adequately clarify these questions, which at present must remain merely suggestions for inquiry; nevertheless, a few observations are in order. Since not all Protestants can be shown to share Marvell's contradictory philosophical and political sympathies (Milton springs immediately to mind), the same conflicts could not reasonably be expected to operate in each, although they or related contradictions might explain some of the peculiar tensions and unexpected resolutions observable in specific practitioners either in this or in the more narrowly Metaphysical tradition. With respect to Marvell himself, however, we appear to be on firmer ground. In at least two other major lyrics, "The Garden" and "To His Coy Mistress," the reader is jarred free from the paradoxes posed by landscape and conducted out of the lyric by allusions to the noncontradictory linearity of human time. The final stanzas of each contain allusions to the sun, that ticking clock that in "The Garden" "computes the time as well as we!" (70). Since we are not as innocent as the bees and flowers, not only the sun but the stars, in fact a whole *real* and not merely *floral zodiac* (65-68) stands at our back, the literal equivalent of "times winged Charriot" that the poet always hears "hurrying near" (22). In "To his Coy Mistress" the latter lines in fact force us not only from both Petrarchan and Platonic conceits and into the light of the sun (45), but "through the Iron gates of Life" (44): out of reversible space and into linear time.

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APPENDIX

Where the remote *Bermudas* ride
 In th' Oceans bosome unesp'y'd,
 From a small Boat, that row'd along,
 The listning Winds receiv'd this Song.
 What should we do but sing his Praise
 That led us through the watry Maze,
 Unto an Isle so long unknown,
 And yet far kinder than our own?
 Where he the huge Sea-Monsters wracks,
 That lift the Deep upon their Backs. 10
 He lands us on a grassy Stage;
 Safe from the Storms, and Prelat's rage.
 He gave us this eternal Spring,
 Which here enamells every thing;
 And sends the Fowl's to us in care,
 On daily Visits through the Air.
 He hangs in shades the Orange bright,
 Like golden Lamps in a green Night.
 And does in the Pomgranates close,
 Jewels more rich than *Ormus* show's. 20
 He makes the Figs our mouths to meet;
 And throws the Melons at our feet.
 But Apples plants of such a price,
 No Tree could ever bear them twice.
 With Cedars, chosen by his hand,
 From *Lebanon*, he stores the Land.
 And makes the hollow Seas, that roar,
 Proclaime the Ambergris on shoar.
 He cast (of which we rather boast)
 The Gospels Pearl upon our Coast. 30
 And in these Rocks for us did frame
 A Temple, where to sound his Name.
 Oh let our Voice his Praise exalt,
 Till it arrive at Heavens Vault:
 Which thence (perhaps) rebounding, may
 Echo beyond the *Mexique Bay*,

Thus sung they, in the *English* boat,
 An holy and a chearful Note,
 And all the way, to guide their Chime,
 With falling Oars they kept the time.

40

NOTES

1. Graham Parry, *Seventeenth-Century Poetry: The Social Context* (London: Hutchinson, 1985), 222 and 242.

2. As Annabel Patterson points out in *Marvell and the Civic Crown* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) the critical practice of separating the political from the lyrical poet derives from Legouis's influential biography and continues to be supported by modern editions of Marvell's poems. As she remarks, "Recent studies of Marvell have not been able to avoid these apparently natural boundaries, though some have tried" (6). She describes her own project, however, not as one of restoring "the potential wholeness of this other Marvell," but of "trying only to fill the gaps" (14). She thus concerns herself almost exclusively with the political Marvell. A notable exception to Patterson's rule is Margarita Stocker's *Apocalyptic Marvell* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1986).

3. Earl Miner, *The Metaphysical Mode from Donne to Cowley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 197.

4. Miner, *ibid.* Parry similarly finds that "Marvell seems almost consciously to be tidying up and terminating the Caroline tradition, putting the finishing touches on various conventions, giving them one last perfect and unfollowable performance before the shadows of history close on them" (222).

5. Miner, 203.

6. The text of this and all subsequent quotations from Marvell's work is taken from *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). Line numbers are indicated. The complete text of "Bermudas" is given in the appendix.

7. Rosalie Colie, "Marvell's 'Bermudas' and the Puritan Paradise," *Renaissance News*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1957): 75-79.

8. Colie, 79.

9. Miner, 3.

10. John Crowe Ransom, "Poetry: A Note in Ontology," in Hazard Adams, ed., *Critical Theory Since Plato* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 880. Ransom is, of course, himself one of the foremost of the New Critics, a fact that in no way undercuts the applicability of his remarks here. That his focus on

"miraculism" may have been taken as a narrowly aesthetic one in its original context need not mean that its insights cannot later be broadened to include a social as well as a personal religious perspective.

11. Stocker, 201.
12. Frank Kermode, "The Argument of Marvell's 'Garden,'" in *Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, ed. William R. Keast (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 290-304; see especially 294.
13. Parry, 222.
14. William G. Madsen, *From Shadowy Types to Truth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 85-86. Madsen's source for these remarks can be found in F. W. Dillistone's *Christianity and Symbolism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 44-69.
15. Joan Webber, *The Eloquent "I": Style and Self in Seventeenth Century Prose* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 7-8.
16. Webber, 14.
17. The prevalent Puritan view of the New World as the promised land or New Eden is of course well known; see Parry, 242, and, for a more general overview, the concluding chapter of C. A. Patrides's *The Grand Design of God: The Literary Form of the Christian View of History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).
18. Thomas H. Luxon, "Calvin and Bunyan on Word and Image: Is There a Text in Interpreter's House?" *English Literary Renaissance*, vol. 18, no. 3 (1988): 456.
19. Parry, 230.
20. Bruce King, *Marvell's Allegorical Poetry* (Cambridge: Oleander Press, 1977), 39.
21. Levi-Strauss identifies two modes of reversible time ("empty" and "cyclical"), but no corresponding mode of reversible space; both concepts correspond to a circular, mythical intuition of time. See Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1963), 301-2. Other descriptions of spatial reversibility exist, but not, insofar as I am aware, in the present definition or context. For a classic study along different but related lines, see Roland Barthes, *Sur Racine*, trans. as *On Racine* by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), especially his discussions in chapter one on division and reversal. Barthes's reversal, however, concerns action as well as space.
22. This view of "Bermudas" is also suggested by Joseph Summers, who in "Marvell's 'Nature'" finds that in this scene "God himself is the manlike decorator." See Michael Wilding, ed., *Marvell, Modern Judgements* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1969), 149.
23. Carrol B. Cox, "Civil Society and the Abstract Individual in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies* XXIII (1987): 176.

24. The more conservative tenor of Marvell's poetics is suggested by the initial reservations he admits in his prefatory verse to *Paradise Lost*:

. . . the Argument

Held me a while misdoubting his Intent,
That he would ruin (for I saw him strong)
The sacred Truths to Fable and old Song . . .
Yet as I read, soon growing less severe,
I lik'd his Project, the success did fear;
Through that wide Field how he his way should find
O're which lame Faith leads Understanding blind,
Lest he perplex the things he would explain,
And what was easie he should render vain. (5-8, 11-16)