

CHATTERTON LECTURE ON POETRY

‘Courtesie is fatal’:  
The Civil and Visionary Poetics  
of Andrew Marvell

NIGEL SMITH  
*Keble College, Oxford*

Who should commend his mistress now? Or who  
Praise him? Both difficult indeed to do  
With truth.

*Flecknoe, an English Priest at Rome, 163–5.*

To say Truth, [the Nonconformists] met in numerous open Assemblys, without any Dread of Government. But the Train Bands in the City, and Soldierie in *Southwark* and Suburbs, harrassed and abused them continually; they wounded many, and killed some Quakers, especially while they took all patiently. . . . The Recorder, among the rest, commended the *Spanish* Inquisition, saying it would never be the well till we had something like it.

Marvell to William Popple, 28 Nov. 1670 (*Poems and Letters*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, 3rd edn., rev. Pierre Legouis (Oxford, 1971), II. 317–18).

JOHN LOCKE DOMINATES OUR VIEW of civil liberties and toleration: his impact was immediate, far-reaching and authoritative.<sup>1</sup> But in the years before Locke’s rise to prominence, the most famous writer on toleration was Andrew Marvell, and this was due to the widespread currency of his satirical treatises of the 1670s, particularly *The Rehearsal Transpros’d* and *Mr. Smirke*. It is a commonplace to note that Marvell had almost no public reputation as a poet at this time, and if he did, it was largely as the author of a number of salacious verse satires, themselves an inseparable part of political (not lyric) life. Many hostile commentators noted with

Read at the Academy 25 November 1998.

<sup>1</sup> See Annabel Patterson, *Early Modern Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1997), ch. 7.

*Proceedings of the British Academy*, 101, 173–189. © The British Academy 1999.

disgust or incomprehension Marvell's liberal position, with its clear sense that persecution for belief was a public as well as a petulant discourtesy:

For it is a childish thing . . . either to demand from the Nonconformists a patern of their Worship . . . or else to require of them some particular command against the Cross, or kneeling . . . superseding and extinguishing the Conscience, or exposing it to the severest penalites.<sup>2</sup>

Yet it was also important to Marvell's enemies that he could be represented as a failed poet:

I am sorry we have lost the prime pen, therefore make sure of Andrew [Marvell]. He's a shrewd man against Popery, though, for his religion, you may place him as Pasquin placed Henry VIII betwixt Moses, the Messiah and Mohammed, with the motto, *Quo me vertam, nescio*. 'Tis well he is now transposed into politics, they say he had much a do to live on poetry.<sup>3</sup>

What then does poetry have to do with toleration?

For Marvell, poetry was the means by which toleration, and its opposite, persecution, was understood. But the key to this relationship lies in Marvell's prose. The texture of the prose satires is poetic, just like Milton's tracts of the 1640s. It is no surprise that Milton's defence of press freedom, and Milton's person, are strongly present in important parts of *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*.<sup>4</sup> All of the responses to the first part of *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, we learn in the second part, contain one 'Ghost that hath haunted me in those differing dresses and Vehicles', and the life of that ghost is described by an extensive quotation and paraphrase of Donne's 'Progresse of the Soule'.<sup>5</sup> Marvell's ghost is Bishop Parker in the first instance, who is accused earlier in the treatise of spooking Milton ('you frequented J. M. incessantly and haunted his house day by day'), but this certain identity fades into the anonymity of a sepulchral and generalised spirit of persecution.

<sup>2</sup> *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, and *The Rehearsal Transpros'd The Second Part* (1673), ed. D. I. B. Smith (Oxford, 1971), 99. Cp. Locke, *A Letter concerning Toleration* (1689; Buffalo, NY, 1990), 16: 'If any one maintain that men ought to be compelled by fire and sword to profess certain doctrines, and conform to this or that exterior worship . . . if any one endeavor to convert those that are erroneous unto the faith, by forcing them to profess things that they do not believe . . . he that principally intends by those means to compose a truly Christian church, is altogether incredible.' Patterson, *op. cit.*, 242, 245–8, notes that Marvell's nephew, William Popple, translated Locke's *Letter* from Latin into English.

<sup>3</sup> CSPD, Addenda, 18 April 1678, 'A Letter from Amsterdam to a friend in England'.

<sup>4</sup> *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, and *The Rehearsal Transpros'd The Second Part*, 5, 311–13.

<sup>5</sup> *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, 175–8.

To say the least, Marvell's passage is a strange and indirect way to address the sphere of human rights.

At this point of most sophisticated attack we enter a mode by which Marvell composed poetry, to confront the implication that the life of a persecutor is also the life of a poetic source, and the voice of a poetic other. For the quotation and paraphrase of Donne is the way in which Marvell wrote poetry: a pattern not merely of imitation, but an exaggeration of that art to its very limit, taking passages of (often recently published) verse and reworking them, rewriting them in a better way. Elsewhere in part one of *The Rehearsal Transpros'd* lines from Sir William Davenant's *Gondibert* (1. 2. 42) are inhabited and transformed, ironically representing the great Puritan divine John Owen as a supreme lover rather than what he was, the hunted.<sup>6</sup>

The paragraph that follows the citation of Donne begins an even longer satirical tracing for Parker's origins that delivers the worrying perspective of likeness between persecutor and poet:

Whoever shall go back to trace his Original, will quickly be at a stand & find themselves so soon involved in the Fabulous Age, that they will run astray and be benighted in his History before noon. They will find his *Saturn* to have reign'd much later than *William the Conqueror*; or if, like a true born *Arcadian*, he derive himself from before the Moon, it must be understood concerning the last Change. I cannot yet learn, though he hath employed me long about it, who was his Grand-father: but, as a modern as he must have been, 'tis the certainer Heraldry to extract him from a *Vesicle of the Earth*, and let him go for the Grand-son of a *Pimple*.<sup>7</sup>

The components of these sentences are replicated in Marvell's earlier lyric poetry. A 'vesicle' or hollow swelling is just like the empty tomb in which the poet's 'ecchoing song' pines for his dead mistress in *To His Coy Mistress*; the heraldry restates the way in which Marvell's thwarted lovers, notably the mowers, sign themselves.<sup>8</sup> Likeness is appropriate, for both Parker and Marvell were sons of Puritan clergymen, and both prospered during the Commonwealth as exponents of Puritan discipline. Marvell claimed that his acquaintance with Parker was slight, but of all the early commentators on Marvell's verse, Parker alone confesses that he knew the poet's lyrics, as opposed to his state satires of the Restoration: 'juvenile Essays of Ballads, Poesies,

<sup>6</sup> *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, 8; the quotation is deployed by Marvell as part of his sexual defamation of Parker.

<sup>7</sup> *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, The Second Part 178.

<sup>8</sup> See *To his Coy Mistress*, 27–8; *The Mower's Song*, 27–8; *The Unfortunate Lover*, st. 8. All references to line numbers are in italics.

Anagrams and Acrosticks'.<sup>9</sup> Earlier, Marvell ridicules simplistic fable-making, a standard method of Reformation polemic, familiar from the Foxean tradition, while engaging in an equally conventional *topos* of persecution writing, the naming of instruments of persecution.<sup>10</sup> It is fair to say that this excursus into the matter of persecution makes the recognisable rhetoric of persecution and martyrdom in the treatise look virtually anodyne.<sup>11</sup>

Persecution is strongly rooted in Marvell's earlier poetry. The speaker in *The Gallery* imagines his lover, Clora, as an 'inhuman murderess' whose weapons are 'Engines more keen than ever yet/ Adorned a tyrant's cabinet' (13–14). In *A Dialogue between the Soul and Body*, the Soul imagines itself as at the mercy of the torturer Body:

*Soul*

O who shall, from this dungeon, raise  
 A soul enslav'd so many ways?  
 With bolts of bones, that fettered stands  
 In feet; and manacled in hands.  
 Here blinded with an eye; and there  
 Deaf with the drumming of an ear. 5  
 A soul hung up, as 'twere, in chains  
 Of nerves, and arteries, and veins.

In *Upon Appleton House*, during the speaker's most unattached, reflective fantasy, nature enters as chief bonecracker:

Bind me ye woodbines in your twines,  
 Curl me about ye gadding vines, 610  
 And oh so close your circles lace,  
 That I may never leave this place:  
 But, lest your fetters prove too weak,  
 Ere I your silken bondage break,  
 Do you, O brambles, chain me too, 615  
 And courteous briars nail me through.

LXXVIII

Here in the morning tie my chain,  
 Where the two woods have made a lane;  
 While, like a guard on either side,

<sup>9</sup> *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, The Second Part, 312; Samuel Parker, *A Reproof to the Rehearsal Transposed* (1673), 269.

<sup>10</sup> *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, 26, 95.

<sup>11</sup> See John Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563–1694* (Cambridge, 1993).

The trees before their Lord divide; 620  
 This, like a long and equal thread,  
 Betwixt two labyrinths does lead.  
 But, where the floods did lately drown,  
 There at the evening stake me down.

What begins in the fashion of a lover's address to his mistress ends in an invitation to executioners, and they are interestingly indistinct.

Furthermore, in one of Marvell's earliest datable poems, persecution has a figural life crucial to a discussion of what poetry is. Marvell's satire of the Catholic poet and lutanist Richard Flecknoe (?1646) is concerned to the point of nauseous horror with what the aspirant poet Marvell might very easily become: an impoverished poetaster, wrecked by the unnatural requirements of priestly life. The speaker positions himself as a Protestant martyr to an Inquisitorial Jesuit torturer-poet:

Straight without further information,  
 In hideous verse, he, in a dismal tone, 20  
 Begins to exercise, as if I were  
 Possessed; and sure the Devil brought me there.  
 But I, who now imagined my self brought  
 To my last trial, . . .  
 . . . I, silent, turned my burning ear  
 Towards the verse; and when that could not hear,  
 Held him the other; and unchangèd yet,  
 Asked still for more, and prayed him to repeat:  
 Till the tyrant, weary to persecute, 35  
 Left off, and tried t'allure me with his lute.<sup>12</sup>

The poem is concerned with the construction of the poet's body. As much as Marvell imitates Flecknoe's voice in order to ridicule him, so also he presents us with the emaciated, even transparent, Catholic body:

Nothing now our dinner stayed  
 But till he had himself a body made.  
 I mean till he were dressed: for else so thin  
 He stands, as if he only fed had been 60  
 With consecrated wafers: and the Host  
 Hath sure more flesh and blood than he can boast.

The body is the outside of an absent inside: it is both the trappings of Roman Catholic theology viewed through a very Protestant lens, and the massed copies of manuscript verse. If Marvell had been converted by the Jesuits, this is how he might have been imagined; the heavy

<sup>12</sup> Note the further conjunction of torture and love.

reliance of the poem upon emblem books, some of which were clearly Roman Catholic, reinforces this interpretation.<sup>13</sup> It seems to me that Marvell is voicing here an anxiety about his own status as a poet, what a poet says, what a poet is; just as he is repelled not only by Tom May's drunken voice but also by his gross body, which is to be variously tortured in the classical hell.<sup>14</sup> The body as Marvell constructs it is in effect the public identity of the poet. It is all of the things that make up the poet's public and publicly articulated private identity—from his physical health and sexual preferences, through his well-being with regard to patronage, to his religious and political opinions. Its flesh and bones are rhymed words, and its chromosomes are the rules of prosody and the ancients' bag of schemes and tropes. To this extent, Marvell's penchant for echoes of, and allusions to, the works of other poets, equates with the impoverished Flecknoe's nature: it is and is not sympathy with the other poet, or more accurately, the poet's body. Being so thin as to be transparent, Flecknoe looks like the objects he stands in front of: the 'chamelion' poet (82).<sup>15</sup> And here, there is another danger, for one's own verse, even if saved for the correct religious confession, might still be wrecked by someone else's performance of it. So Marvell's Flecknoe howls in pain (this time the image of torture is presumably of a recusant Englishman) as the gentleman at dinner debases bad verse further in his recitation.

Elsewhere, great poetry is associated with the best poetic bodies, such as that of the cavalier poet Richard Lovelace. Marvell's speaker admires the famous beau. It is a moment charged with homosocial desire, and one that pits a potential union of poets against a hostile world of—yes, again—religious persecution: 'The barbèd censurers begin to look / Like the grim consistory on thy book' (*To his Noble Friend, Mr. Richard Lovelace*, 21–2). This is the context in which we should review those often-mentioned special qualities of Marvell's verse that are in many respects properly termed libertine: the interpenetration of physical objects (*Flecknoe*, *The Match*, *An Horatian Ode*), and the sympathies and reciprocations generated between disparate or even opposed entities (*On a Drop of Dew*, *The Coronet*). A distanced response to these predicaments is achieved in a poem like *The Mower*

<sup>13</sup> Pierre Legouis, *Andrew Marvell. Poet, Puritan, Patriot* (Oxford, 1965), 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Tom May's Death*, 11–2, 90–100.

<sup>15</sup> Unlike the poet in Marston's *Satyre I. 1–2*: 'I cannot show in strange proportion, / Changing my hew like a Camelion'.

against *Gardens* where interpenetrative hybridisation (i.e., tree grafting) is regarded as a threat. Could it be that poetry's truth offends the proprieties not merely of public discipline, but also the Book of Nature? Poetry may confer immortality; it risks violent punishment, and it may incur damnation for the poet.

Poetic creation and the performance of poetry, to say nothing of sexual desire, are figured through images of violent persecution. They also involve the presence of another personality, usually a poet. The presence of this poetic other is evident even in Marvell's most accomplished verse, but here Marvell's speakers begin to show mastery over these poetic presences. Good verse and harmonious music, well-performed, equate with sympathy. 'Well-played' political states are the epitome of civility (they are civilised and they are morally excellent) in Marvell's great Commonwealth poems.<sup>16</sup> They are expressed in a prosody that famously generates energy from opposed images and contrapuntal or antiphonal rhythms.<sup>17</sup> The prototype for the analogy in Marvell's verse was *Musick's Empire*, four stanzas of which are heavily indebted to lines in Sir William Davenant's *Gondibert* (1651). But as with many of the poems he used, Marvell reworked and inverted Davenant's poetry and hence his poetics. Here, Marvell's analogy between music and the history of civilisation is Aristotelian and consonant with the Machiavellian historiography of his republican associates John Milton and Marchamont Nedham. He also reflects a more Miltonic conception of the state as a vibrant aggregation of (dis)harmonious elements, as opposed to Davenant's image of music as a form of distraction that facilitates social control:

Others may object that Poesy on our Stage, or the Heroick in Musick (for so the latter was anciently us'd) is prejudiciall to a State; as begetting Levity, and giving the People too great a diversion by pleasure and mirth. To these (if they be worthy of Satisfaction) I reply; That whoever in Government endeavors to make the People serious and grave, (which are attributes that may become the Peoples *Representatives*, but not the People) doth practice a new way to enlarge the State, by making every Subject a *Statesman*: and he that means to governe so mournfully (as it were, without any Musick in his Dominion) must lay but light burdens on his Subjects.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Also imagined as a rape in *Upon a Eunuch: a Poet*, 3–5: 'Tibi Fama perennè / Praegnabit; rapiesque novem de monte sorores; / Et pariet modulos Echo repetita nepotes'. (Fame will be continually pregnant by you, / And you will snatch the nine sisters from the mountain; / Echo too, often struck, will bring forth musical offspring.)

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., *The First Anniversary*, 87–94.

<sup>18</sup> Sir William Davenant, *Gondibert* (1651), ed., David F. Gladish (Oxford, 1971), 39–40.

Marvell replies to Davenant's pretentious claims to produce epic literature on subjects distanced from the present time, grand claims for poetry as high architecture, a preference for books (as opposed to the book of nature), and the influence in its preface of Hobbes's psychological and political theories. To all of these themes, *Upon Appleton House* replies in the negative, most notably through its concern with a living hero Lord Fairfax who, unlike Davenant's heroes, confronts military action before retiring. *Gondibert* describes a Baconian natural utopia, whereas Marvell's poem enacts one; *Gondibert* reveals a suspicion of courts, described at first by Davenant as gardens, whereas Marvell makes the garden the centre of Fairfax's noble life. Rhodalind's beauty is compared in *Gondibert* to alchemical processes, but the poet doubts that 'Verse has Chymick pow're' (1.4.4.1); Maria Fairfax effects an alchemical transformation, communicated through the verse.

In *Gondibert*, 2.6, Astragon's palace contains a series of pictures, including some of the Creation. At 455–6, Marvell alludes in his poem specifically to *Gondibert*, 2.6. 60: 'Then strait an universal herd appears; / First gazing on each other in the shade; / Wondring with levell'd Eies, and lifted Ears, / Then play, whilst yet their Tyrant is unmade.'

For to this naked equal flat,  
Which Levellers take pattern at, 450  
The villagers in common chase  
Their cattle, which it closer rase;  
And what below the scythe increased  
Is pinched yet nearer by the beast.  
Such, in the painted world, appeared 455  
Dav'nant with th'universal herd.

The scene presented to the poet by the Nun Appleton estate, being natural, is the opposite of the artificial palace in Davenant. To put Davenant with his herd suggests that Marvell is mocking him, given the elitist sentiments expressed in the Preface to *Gondibert*. Has Davenant in Marvell's lines become the tyrant? There is no clear answer. Marvell seems primarily to stress the manner in which habits of perception and representation determine how we view and describe what we see.<sup>19</sup> Yet when Marvell was writing *Upon Appleton House* Davenant

<sup>19</sup> No accident is it either that the poet's frame is one of observation, a topos of mimesis, while the actions being described are the opposites of mimesis (since it relies upon distance and the preservation of the object)—consumption and diet:



was in prison, detained at the pleasure of the Commonwealth, awaiting trial on a charge of treason, the punishment for which was death.<sup>20</sup>

The poems written during the Commonwealth period are full of confidence, even to the extent that the conquered praise their own defeat.<sup>21</sup> I believe that Marvell was part of a kind of poetic club in these years—producing verse alongside his acquaintances and collaborators in order to find the voice of, ultimately, the new free state, and the new lover: Thomas Stanley, John Hall of Durham, Marchamont Nedham, possibly even Lovelace. The nature of the quest in this club—which appears to be connected with the scientific questionings of the Hartlib circle—is to have recourse beyond all poetic voices to ultimate cosmic realities, as instanced in Hall's poem to his tutor, John Pawson, one of Marvell's sources. This drive amounts to a search for that energy missing in the poet that poetry can only frustratingly register:

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. 45

Come, let us run  
 And give the world a girdle with the sun;  
 For so we shall  
 Take a full view of this enamelled ball.

---

They seem within the polished grass  
 A landskip drawn in looking-glass.  
 And shrunk in the huge pasture show  
 As spots, so shaped, on faces do. 460  
 Such fleas, ere they approach the eye,  
 In multiplying glasses lie.  
 They feed so wide, so slowly move,  
 As constellations do above.

The fleas in the magnifying glass are the mowers in the water meadows between Appleton House and the River Wharfe. It is the mowers who embody and give voice to the mirrored, or second consciousness in Marvell's verse; a quality of doubleness that is part of a uniquely Marvellian version of Virgilian and Ovidian poetry: see below, p. 185.

<sup>20</sup> See Mary Edmond, *Rare Sir William Davenant* (Cambridge, 1987), 103–20; the point is made with regard to *Tom May's Death* by Elsie Duncan-Jones, 'Marvell: A Great Master of Words', *PBA*, 61 (1975), 267–90 (282).

<sup>21</sup> See *An Horatian Ode*, 73–80.

. . .  
 O, let us tear  
 A passage through  
 That floating vault above.<sup>22</sup>

*An Horatian Ode* turns, however, not on the presence of another poet or poets, but on an exchange of energy between builder-poet and conquering hero in which the identities and functions of both fuse at the point of panegyric, putting an end to the poet's embarrassed self-consciousness. Cromwell burning through the air is, as David Norbrook has shown, suspiciously like the language of John Hall's translation of Longinus' *On the Sublime*, so that Cromwell is presented as a sublime poet.<sup>23</sup> In *The First Anniversary*, a poem that repeats and echoes Cromwellian speeches and themes, the Lord Protector is figured as the chief poetic intelligence of the poem, leaving the speaker to 'hollo far behind' him (126).

Marvell's poetry of liberty in these years confesses its withdrawal from the Caroline and Royalist aesthetic that was its first nurturing, and then sets about elaborating the prosody of the Commonwealth, while acknowledging the destruction of the old order. But in the autumn of 1658, being so responsive to the undulations of contingency, Marvell's elegy on Cromwell begins to unravel the strands that made Commonwealth panegyric apt and possible. Among the purported weaknesses detected by critics in the poem are the nebulous and difficult sentences, usually an effect of syntactical inversion, or *hysteron proteron* (e.g. 13–18, 223–6, 273–6), and less commonly, ellipsis (e.g. 189–90, 128, 216, 276). Ambiguity is not cleverly poised, as in the previous two Cromwell poems (and especially *An Horatian Ode*), but is an effect of blurred and indistinct syntax. Would Marvell have let such a poem be entered for a collection that would eventually be published, or are the apparent blemishes genuine examples of poetic failure, perhaps induced by haste in the circumstances of the Protector's death? One solution is that the poem is marked by deliberate failures of poetic sentence: Cromwell's death brings about the end of good poetry. Ellipsis is a kind of 'choking' in the voice of grief—an effect by no means unknown in mannered seventeenth-century elegies. Some sentences in the poem 'fool' the

<sup>22</sup> *To his Coy Mistress*, 41–6; John Hall, 'To his Tutor, Master Pawson. An Ode' (1647), 13–6, 50–2.

<sup>23</sup> David Norbrook, 'Marvell's *An Horatian Ode* and the Politics of Genre', in T. Healy and J. Sawday, eds., *Literature and the English Civil War* (Cambridge, 1990), 147–69.

reader, appearing to be pointing to one meaning for the first half, and then effecting a reversal and clarification in the second half: 'Pity it seemed to hurt him'—'more that felt / Each wound himself which he to others dealt' (197–8). Cromwell, these features tell us, though dead, is always ready to bounce back.

Within this structure, the major theme of mutuality and reflexiveness is located, and usually expressed in very clear syntax. Thus, Providence, described as a mirror, looks into *itself* to discover Cromwell's fate. Nature and Cromwell are identical: Nature appears to fight Nature for Cromwell's death (133). The infant Eliza replaced the milk in her mother's breast with love (36). Cromwell and his daughter are likewise mutual reflections of each other's love, to the extent that they become the same entity: as the disease 'melts' his daughter, so Cromwell also inwardly wastes away (here they are not mirrors—Eliza is a wax model of her father within him). This is compounded by vocabulary of 'doubling' (57, 66), and by paradoxes that enhance the sense of a closeness that is poignantly harmful to both father and daughter. Eliza's dying breath tarnishes the 'polished mirror' of her father's breastplate,<sup>24</sup> and this is enough to set him in his decline (later on Richard Cromwell, the glittering image of his father, has his 'beams' 'obscured' by grief for his father's death). The image of life on the mirror of Cromwell's dead face (257–60) suggests that he will return to life.

Mirroring suggests replication and the impermeability of surfaces. It is not concerned with bodily reconstruction as is Milton's verse. The mirrored reflections in Milton are famously connected with feminine self-consciousness.<sup>25</sup> In Marvell, they are images of heroic self-awareness and Narcissistic self-desire:

Lovely and admirable as he was,  
Yet was his sword or armour all his glass.  
Nor in his mistress' eyes that joy he took,  
As in an enemy's himself to look.  
*An Elegy Upon the Death of My Lord Francis Villiers, 51–4.*

Transferred to the objects of his praise, mirrored people (dead Villiers or the dead Cromwell; heroes cut down to size) become repetitions of their own perfections. They have no origins to which they might return. The mirroring masks a corporeality that exercised Milton in *Lycidas* (a

<sup>24</sup> A scenic echo of the dead Cordelia in Lear's arms?

<sup>25</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 4. 453–76.

poem that Marvell literally echoes in both the Flecknoe satire and the Cromwell elegy), and that he was able to overcome in his late poetry (and probably before in the prose). Marvell does not have this achievement, and rotting Cromwell could not cease—to rot.

Toleration is a kind of public courtesy. Perhaps Marvell's greatest courteous statement is addressed to the man he thought had guaranteed for a few years the highest degree of religious toleration, Oliver Cromwell. The sentence has that alarming quality of being virtually a parody of itself, or, in its intensity, giving the sense that the poet's earlier Royalist connections might have put him in trouble with the new regime: 'It might perhaps seem fit for me to seek out words to give your Excellence thanks for my selfe.'<sup>26</sup> Courtesy meets poetic doubles in an opposite of mirrors: as we have seen, an exchange of energy between builder-poet and conquering hero in which the identities and functions of both fuse at the point of panegyric, putting an end to the poet's embarrassed self-consciousness. Significantly, in a poem appreciative of Marvell's verse, and written shortly after his death, the poet is likened to a comet, both an omen to rulers and a sublime poet:

On whom the wondrous Age did stare and gaze  
As purblind people do when Comets blaze  
And their presaging influence do spread  
Upon the Crowned and the Mitred Head.<sup>27</sup>

Just so in *The First Anniversary* do the monarchs, like astrologers, search the sky for signs of their mortality (38–40), 'While indefatigable Cromwell hies, / And cuts his way still nearer to the skies' (45–6). Milton could not reach this synthesis, for the power of the poet-prophet as national redeemer was too strong, and ultimately the recording of power was one of taintedness. Marvell's equivocal synthesis was his poet's release from the slavery of mirrors, and the hold of Narcissus.

But this synthesis was outmanoeuvred by events. The dissipation of civic virtue in the Restoration further unwound Marvell's Commonwealth poetic. In the year of his untimely death, 1678, the 'good old cause' was about to find renewed vigour in the Exclusion Crisis: the leader of the opposition to royal and Anglican supremacy, the Earl of

<sup>26</sup> Letter to Oliver Cromwell, 28 July 1653, *Poems and Letters*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, 3rd edn., rev. Pierre Legouis (Oxford, 1971), II, 304.

<sup>27</sup> Quarto volume listed as in the possession of Sir Richard Graham of Norton Conyers, near Ripon, Yorkshire in 1971; *HMC*, Sixth Report (1887), 342–4; the poem is reprinted in L. A. Davies, 'An Unpublished Poem about Andrew Marvell', *YES*, 1 (1971), 100–1.

Shaftesbury, begins to figure in Marvell's pamphlets and letters of the later 1670s, and Marvell's last prose writings deploy a 'naked' directness necessary for the exposure of a new tyranny. *The Last Instructions* and *The Loyal Scot* represent a revived poetics in which Virgilian and Ovidian components did fitting courtesy to a national crisis, while backhandedly beginning to configure the poetry of toleration. In this way the monstrosity of the Restoration court and church was haunted. Had there been world enough and time, there might have been another great poem or several for the 1680s. As it was, the reading public had to make do with the *Miscellaneous Poems* of 1681, which, in its uncancelled form, recirculated commonwealth poetics, alongside the mysterious revelations of distraught mowers, disembodied voices in empty tombs, and androgynous Adams. As an early annotator wrote, possibly in the decade following publication, in a copy now owned by the University of Illinois, 'virtute, non aliter'.<sup>28</sup>

Marvell's best satirical verse of the late 1660s and 1670s, still and often intimately related to Milton's writings, challenges the Virgilian celebration of Charles II's reign, while showing the court to be the beggary of 'courtesie'. The erotic but sordid and sad account of the Duchess of Castlemaine's seduction of her footman is a double reversal of an amorous chase. Now an old and lusty nymph pursues a young satyr:

Great Love, how dost thou triumph and how reign,  
That to a groom couldst humble her disdain!  
Stripped to her skin, see how she stooping stands,  
Nor scorns to rub him down with those fair hands,  
And washing (lest the scent her crime disclose) 95  
His sweaty hooves, tickles him 'twixt the toes.

Not fatal for the groom, but nearly so, since 'the rogue was whipped in porter's den'.

A Marvellian character who died in an act of heroic defence was Archibald Douglas, celebrated in the two long verse satires, *The Last Instructions to a Painter* and *The Loyal Scot*. The Virgilian and Ovidian presence in Marvell is, as several have remarked, a measure of homoerotic and Narcissistic energy.<sup>29</sup> It is also invariably elegiac in

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Marvell, *Miscellaneous Poems* (1681), 139, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, shelfmark g.821M361969a.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Hammond, 'Marvell's Sexuality', *The Seventeenth Century*, XI. 1 (1996), 87–123 (101–17).

character. The lines committing Douglas to history and memory in *The Last Instructions*: 'Fortunate boy, if either pencil's fame, / Or if my verse can propagate they name, / When Oeta and Alcides are forgot, / Our English youth shall sing the valiant Scot',<sup>30</sup> echo Virgil's memorialising of Nisus and Euryalus, slain by the Rutulians while on a night raid: 'Fortunati ambo! si quid mea carmina possunt, / nulla dies umquam memori vos eximet aevo, / dum domus Aeneae Capitoli immobile saxum / accolet imperiumque pater Romanus habebit.' (Happy pair! If aught my verse avail, no day shall ever blot you from the memory of time, so long as the house of Aeneas shall dwell on the Capitol's unshaken rock, and the Father of Rome hold sovereign sway!)<sup>31</sup> As Marvell's narrator appears moved by Douglas's youth and beauty, so Nisus and Euryalus are closely bonded: Nisus sacrifices himself to avenge Euryalus's death. Euryalus 'sinks' into the ground, compared to wilting or severed plants, just as Douglas melts.<sup>32</sup> Marvell's homoerotic narrative is thus suggested in part by Virgil's homosocial tragedy. Who is Douglas's Euryalus? It cannot be the English navy, whose self-defence had been so shambolic. The finger that identifies points as much at the poet, as much as the poet also voices Virgil: a rather different kind of haunting.

Douglas was almost certainly a Roman Catholic, who had burned alive while defending a ship during the Dutch raid on the Medway in June 1667.<sup>33</sup> The passage, which Marvell then placed in *The Loyal Scot* (15–62), is justly celebrated as one of the most exquisitely arresting in the poet's corpus. *The Loyal Scot* is supposedly written in the voice of the (by then dead) Royalist poet, John Cleveland. Cleveland's 'torturing art' is turned around in depicting Douglas's death as a kind of alchemy where true nationhood, defined not as linguistic and cultural difference ('Nation is all but name as shibboleth' (246)), but as the geographical proximity of peoples, is acknowledged:

No more discourse of Scotch or English race,  
 Nor chant the fab'lous hunt of Chevy Chase. 70  
 Mixed in Corinthian metal, at thy flame  
 Our nations melting, thy colossus frame,

<sup>30</sup> *The Last Instructions to a Painter*, 693–6; *The Loyal Scot*, 59–62.

<sup>31</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, 9. 446–9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. 433–7.

<sup>33</sup> See Martin Delzainis, 'Marvell and the Earl of Castlemaine', in *Marvell and Liberty*, (1999) eds. Warren Chernaik and Martin Delzainis, 290–312 (296).

Shall fix a foot on either neighbouring shore,  
And join those lands that seemed to part before.  
Prick down the point (whoever has the art), 75  
Where Nature Scotland does from England part.  
Anatomists may sooner fix the cells  
Where life resides, or understanding dwells:  
But this we know, though that exceed their skill,  
That whosoever separates them doth kill. 80

Marvell teaches that the source of division is not the Tweed but Lindisfarne, Holy Island, by which he means the bishops of the Church of England, who become a cancerous double in the body politic, a realisation of what would, by analogy, happen, if one's poetic double crept into one's real poetic body:

Britain was between two kings distressed.  
But when one head does both realms control,  
The bishop's noddle perks up cheek by jowl.  
They, though no poets, on Parnassus dream,  
And in their causes think themselves supreme. 195  
King's-head saith this, but bishop's-head that do;  
Does Charles the Second reign, or Charles the Two?

Bishops are no poets, but in so far as they contest authority with kings, they simulate the double-bodied verse at the heart of Marvell's poetic practice. We the English readers must now learn, so the poem teaches, to have sympathy with our Scottish neighbours (a rare thing in the seventeenth century), nay, even to regard them as of our nation, through a practice of poetic sympathy that permits Marvell to speak through, then revise, his poetic other.

And yet there is no poetic courtesy here, for Marvell's ventriloquism undermined the attempts of Restoration editors to establish a stable canon for Cleveland's works. Cleveland was a royalist satirist writing during the Puritan revolution. His works circulated surreptitiously and often anonymously. After his death, collections of his poems, especially those published posthumously, successively added items he had not written to his 'canon', until an attempt was made by two former students to establish a true canon in an edition of 1677. The fourth edition of Cleveland's poems, *J. Cleaveland Revived*, appeared in 1668 (containing many unauthenticated poems, and very few poems now considered to be Cleveland's), as well as a further edition of *Poems* (with unauthenticated items, but with a greater number of authentic works) in 1669. Dryden had drawn attention to Cleveland's poetic

manner in *An Essay of Dramatick Poesie* (1668),<sup>34</sup> creating the label 'Clevelandism' to name the poet's habit of catachresis, 'wresting and torturing a word into another meaning', and making unfavourable comparisons between Donne and Cleveland, yet reserving for the younger poet the distinction of being the only English poet quoted in the essay (and *The Rebel Scot* is one of the two poems quoted). Cleveland's achievement and reputation was a very real presence in literary affairs when Marvell came to write his satire. To put the elegy on Douglas (lines that are markedly Marvellian) into the mouth of Cleveland's ghost is to replace Cleveland's voice with Marvell's.

The failure of the court was license for the portrayal of the Dutch navy, and Admiral de Ruyter in particular, as a gentle and playfully heroic lover in *The Last Instructions*. Within two years of the Dutch raid on the Medway, Marvell was including the bishops of the Church of England within his sexual badinage. In these circumstances, English maladministration, the poet claimed: 'could not be better imitated or revenged' than in '*Dutch abusive Historical Pictures, and False Medalls*'.<sup>35</sup> In other words, Marvell the patriot crosses into the enemy nation's mode of representation (and hence its sense of national identity) in order to partake of its truth. The proximity of Marvell's earlier Second Dutch War poetry to Dutch literature of the 1660s suggests that Marvell had been doing this for some time. If the suggestion that Marvell was really addressing the marriage alliance between Holland and England (through the union of William the Stadhouder with Princess Mary), presented as an effect of French statecraft, is accepted, Marvell's Anglo-Dutch vision is also veering towards the republican again, and enhanced by his neo-roman portrayal of Shaftesbury.<sup>36</sup> Once again, toleration entails an imaginative embracing of a former enemy nation.

In *A Dialogue between the Soul and Body* 'architects do square and hew / Green trees that in the forest grew' (43–4), but the image is reversed in *An Account of the Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government* (1677): 'men, instead of squaring their Governments by the Rule of Christianity, have shaped Christianity by the Measure of their Government . . . and bungling Divine and Humane things together, have been alwayes hacking

<sup>34</sup> See Dryden, *Works*, vol. 17 (1971), 10, 29–30.

<sup>35</sup> *An Account of the Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government* (1677), 43.

<sup>36</sup> Dean Morgan Schmitter, 'The Occasion for Marvell's *Growth of Popery*', *JHI*, 21 (1960), 568–70; see also Warren Chernaik and Martin Dzelzainis, eds., *Marvell and Liberty* (1999), 'Introduction', 7.



and hewing one another, to frame an irregular Figure of Political Congruity' (34). This, of course, is precisely the disfigurement that *The Loyal Scot* records.

Similar principles are at work in the prose works written in the last decade of Marvell's life. Samuel Parker and other prelates are rendered in gross, enormous, sometimes gender-reversed, sexually repellent terms: 'He puts me in minde of the incorrigible Scold, that though she was duck'd over head and ears under water, yet stretched up her hands with her two thumb-nails in the Nit-cracking posture, or with two fingers divaricated, to call the man still in that Language Lousy Rascal and Cuckold' (72–3). We are in fact back with the body un-beautiful of Flecknoe and pin-up Lovelace. But elsewhere, patristic church history is replayed as an idyll of theatre and trivial game, where well-meaning children are supervised by tolerant bishops: a syntax of indifferency.<sup>37</sup>

Like Lovelace, Oliver Cromwell and his daughter were untouchable: 'Fate could not either reach with single stroke, / But the dear image fled, the mirror broke.' The mirror cracked on 3 September 1658. Yet looking into mirrors, as Ovid's Narcissus episode teaches (as do the many Renaissance versions of the story, including Marvell's), is the most complete and most deceptive act of courtesy. In the mirror, difference collapses into oneness; the toleration of many possibilities disappears in sameness. Marvell's practice finally taught him to see through mirrors, to meet the haunting ghost, making poetry the revelation not of torture but of toleration.

<sup>37</sup> Marvell, *A Short Historical Essay, touching General Councils, Creeds, and Imposition in Religion*, in *Mr. Smirke: or, the Divine in Mode* (1676), 55–6.