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978-0-521-88417-4 - The Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell

Edited by Derek Hirst and Steven N. Zwicker

Excerpt

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I

DEREK HIRST AND STEVEN N. ZWICKER

Introduction

The making of a *Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell* is a more likely enterprise in 2010 than it would have seemed in the late 1980s when Cambridge Companions to individual authors began to appear. Most obviously, the state of Marvell studies has been transformed by new editions of Marvell's poetry and of his polemical writings;¹ we have a more informed appreciation of Restoration politics and religion and of how to track Marvell's presence in those fields;² and we have a more finely grained understanding of writing culture, of manuscript and of print.³ That culture was formed not only of individuals who might have thought of themselves as authors but also of communities that had, in some sense, authorial function – patronage circles, coteries of wit, of partisan affiliation, of spiritual affinity, of gender or perhaps of sexual identity. And in that emerging complication of authorship lies a more fundamental distinction of this moment. The very category of author as subject of study was in the 1980s in some dispute; it had of course been challenged by Foucault's deconstruction of authorship,⁴ but now new historicists and cultural materialists were dispersing authorial agency into a broader circulation of social and cultural energy,⁵ while discourse analysis of various kinds further complicated the notion of authorship.⁶ More broadly too, historians had replaced the old 'history of great men' with a new social history of otherness and dissonance. But from that direction, paradoxically, came an impulse to recover authorship.⁷ For what was at stake in the recovery of lost voices was not only identity politics and ideology but as well the conviction that individuals could raise – author – their own voices; ironically, the most progressive of moves in cultural studies depended on a rather regressive model of autonomy. But such tensions can be productive, and it is hard to imagine a more fruitful moment to hazard a volume on that most elusive author Andrew Marvell: isolate, pseudonymous, ventriloquizing, but collaborative and variously bound to networks of patronage and structures of patriarchy. Indeed, all the complexities of authorship now at play and in tension with histories of identity and print culture help us in recovering Andrew Marvell.

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Yet the model of authorship still most congenial to modern audiences remains the individual and individuated author as genius. Nor should we be quick to abandon this model for Marvell. A number of essays in the *Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell* teach us new ways to appreciate Marvell within those bounds – the lyric grace, the command of cultural registers, the sinuous strength of design, the verbal dexterity and richness of wit. But these essays also teach us to interrogate the model even as they strengthen its claim, for authorship as social practice is newly unfolded by a number of contributors. The sociability of authorship, for example, has been documented as actual collaboration, and elsewhere the late Harold Love has brilliantly illuminated Marvell's verse satires as joint ventures.⁸ But there is sociability as well in Marvell's virtual conversations and complicities with ancient and modern voices. The figure emerging from James Loxley's and Paul Davis's chapters, 2 and 3 respectively, in this volume is more deeply implicated in the languages and locutions of other poets than we have, until recently, been able to appreciate. The wonderful paradox that these essays demonstrate is that even as we see how little of Marvell's language belongs exclusively to Marvell, we understand more clearly that the poems could only have been written by him.

Nor is adaptation the practice of Marvell only as a poet. In Chapter 11, Nicholas von Maltzahn demonstrates that Marvell the prose controversialist was a superb mimic, a consummate practitioner of the art of borrowing another man's language and turning it sharply to his own purposes. Imitation allowed mockery and ridicule, but it also enabled Marvell to expropriate, and to redeploy – we might think, for example, and from a very different register, of the way *The Rehearsal Transpros'd* turns the churchmen's figure of a king as nursing father against their own rigour and intolerance. Of course, Marvell was a practised hand in appropriation. He left behind a wonderful trail of exhausted figures and tropes: Petrarchanism exploded by *To His Coy Mistress*, pastoralism drained of rural complacencies, the country house poem dilated almost beyond recognition and to purposes surely beyond Ben Jonson's imagination. But always, in verse and in prose alike, Marvell's programme of competition and possession was as deeply purposive as it was occasional. As Diane Purkiss shows in Chapter 5, Marvell went to school to others to discover how to admire, how to fix in time, the pre-sexual state; she suggests too how extraordinary were his exercises on this theme. The Catullan origins of *The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn* are not in doubt, but as Matthew C. Augustine demonstrates in Chapter 4, the Nymph is transformed into a figure whose instabilities and erotic indeterminacy cannot be contained by sources and analogues, what Marvell was elsewhere to call

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‘Roman-cast similitudes’. It has taken a modern age, with its own indeterminacies, fully to open and to be open to the scenes of erotic contemplation, invitation and transgression within Marvell’s borrowings and adaptations.

And is there not something particularly of our moment, with its suspicion of the cost of political ideals and ideology, that makes us sensitive as well to the elusive character of Marvell’s political identity and practice? For a long time, surely since the eighteenth century, Marvell has been heard as a singular political voice, as high-minded prophet of toleration and liberty; moreover, the figuring of political singularity would have appealed to Marvell’s own imagining of himself as political actor – the man who might seize ‘the poet’s time’ to stand against the corruption of his age. But he was as well the politician who reflected on the civil wars as ‘a cause too good to have been fought for’. A number of scholars have in recent years excavated Marvell’s texts for evidence of political commitments, situating him variously and eloquently within the shifting political consciousness of his times, amidst imponderables and contingencies. But to what degree did these times and contingencies allow Marvell to form a stable political personality – royalist poet? complaisant turncoat? loyalist servant? scourge of popery? emergent Whig? The effort to reduce these categories to logic or to unitary effect, let alone to discover in their midst a stable identity, leads always to exquisite parsing, and at the very least to the suppression of some elements of Marvell’s story in favour of others. Consistency is a rare quality, and while John Milton, that paragon of purity and ideological coherence, and mentor and colleague to Marvell, might seem a standard by which to judge the younger man, we should not forget that Milton’s own remarkable consistency was an achievement of some self-consciousness, even perhaps of manufacture. Most of Milton’s contemporaries were less concerned with self-idealizing, and we may wonder if Marvell himself did not aim to deflate some of that persona in his doubting and ironic tribute *On Mr Milton’s Paradise Lost*. And we may wonder too how to put together, how to make coherent, Marvell’s later and apparently sterling career as polemicist in what was to become the Whig cause with his submission in 1671–2 of tributary – of abject? – verse on the divinity of Louis XIV’s absolute monarchy.

Are there other, newer, ways to understand political identity? In Chapter 7, Phil Withington turns away from that beguiling theme of singularity to focus instead on Marvell’s long history as practitioner and rhetorician of and for political community. After all, one of the most significant Marvell archives is the collection of constituency letters he wrote as MP and, Withington stresses, as citizen of Hull. Values of community, and here of commons and closes, are discovered too when we turn from institutions and urban environment to lands and landscape. Marvell’s unusual responsiveness to the natural world

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has often been read as a form of excited spiritualism; in Chapter 8, Andrew McRae gives that responsiveness a striking social dimension that complements but goes beyond Marvell's surprising empathy with those who worked the Yorkshire fields. Indeed, McRae urges, there was something prescient in his capacity to imagine not merely the economies of the land but the violence of human practices.

Violence of feeling, violence of action, these are categories that we do not readily associate with Marvell the meticulous letter-writer, scrupulous parliamentarian, scrupling poet: after all, Michael Schoenfeldt reminds us in Chapter 6, Marvell was a poet absorbed by the very matter of aesthetics, by the epistemologies of representation, by perspectives and prisms, by the music and architecture of verse. And we can think of this poet's anger safely contained by the conventions of art as we look towards the satirist scouring wickedness and vice. But in Marvell's case, we need to note the depth of feeling, the acts and anticipations both of violation and predation embedded and implied not only in his satires but also at a number of junctures in his lyric poetry. In Chapter 5, Purkiss argues for the importance of exemplars and models in comprehending such violence, and indeed Davis goes further, in Chapter 3, by suggesting the presence in Marvell's work of a poetics of violence. In Chapter 12, Smith in turn urges us to consider the violence of the man, the outbursts and fighting in the House of Commons and on the German plains; in this regard, Smith observes as well the irony of a Marvell protesting his own lethargy. Does this irony put an almost confessional spin on the poet's fascination with that increasingly fashionable polarity of *otium* and *negotium*? A history of violence also played its part in Marvell's religion which, as John Spurr argues in Chapter 10, was constituted of contradiction: a delicate spirituality, an unmistakable and growing rationalism, and a violent anger against the bishops and their cruelties. Contradiction is of course not an implausible way of narrating Andrew Marvell, but can we go further? The tensions did not remain wholly in suspension; they drove him, and repeatedly, in two directions. One trajectory ran Marvell towards violence and vituperation, the other dispersed him into that more familiar Marvellian terrain of indeterminacy.

Indeterminacy is the defining condition of Marvell's epistemology. It is surely the defining condition of his poetics, as Augustine emphasizes in Chapter 4 – at the level of language, structures, feeling. And what of the spirit? For a mid-seventeenth-century lyric poet, Marvell is unusually silent on matters of the soul. There are of course the two wonderful dialogues, and his simulacrum of devotional anxiety played out in *The Coronet*; but as Spurr argues in Chapter 10, the pursuit of 'the religious' in Marvell is something of an exercise in infinite regression. Marvell's politics by contrast seem

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altogether in a different case, altogether determinate, or at least determinable. And yet the very fact of controversy and contradiction among and between those scholars and critics who have so variously construed Marvell's politics is surely its own argument. Here the test case must be Marvell's Cromwell, and in Chapter 9 Joad Raymond amply demonstrates that an interrogatory lies at the centre of all the Cromwell poems. We have long known this of the *Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland*: it is Marvell's masterpiece of undefinition. As Raymond shows, a similar questioning of the relation of the person to the form drives all three Cromwell pieces – and, we might add, the unsettling representation of monarch and monarchy in *The Last Instructions to a Painter*. And what word more than 'unsettled' might describe the uncertainties of feeling that surround every gesture of erotic attachment in Marvell's poetry? The familiar analytic categories, heterosexual and homoerotic, seem all too fixed for the deep uncertainties of feeling that surround those young girls, those androgynous males, those appetitive and predatory adults who stalk Marvell's writing. But what pushes a pattern of unsettled literary affect towards a deeper indeterminacy are the echoes we may hear of the verse in the traces that remain of the life. Biography aims always to render as whole the necessarily disparate effects of the life, and in Marvell's case that has usually meant the suppression of one part of the life-work in favour of another: exquisite sensibility or patriot hero. But as Smith argues in Chapter 12, the biographer must remain committed to the recovery of the whole, whatever the incompleteness of the life records and however secretive the poet. This is a singular challenge in a case where heterogeneity and indeterminacy are both life and argument, indeed perhaps the life's argument.

Such an Andrew Marvell must seem especially companionable to our own times. 'Shakespeare our contemporary' has been the perennial theme not only of academics but also of a broader cultural appreciation of the ways in which older texts might speak, and might be made to speak, to succeeding generations. And Milton's idealizing of freedom of speech in the activist republic has given him contemporary urgency. But with Andrew Marvell we have had a less certain time hearing his intelligence and sensibility as our own. The twentieth-century Marvell was insistently aestheticized, even etherealized, by the tradition of appreciation that derived from T. S. Eliot. Eliot's denial to the poet of a personality certainly narrowed the grounds for later readers to exercise the faculty of empathy – critical, political, psychological. It is one thing to admire the literary genius, and Eliot did that. But the category of literary genius is always singular, always self-contained. Does it not close off the intimate traffic between circumstance and art and obscure the terrain of uncertainty across which that traffic moved? The various and interlocking

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perspectives of the *Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell* honour Marvell's art and disclose its circumstance; they open as well the indeterminacies which were very much his own, just as surely as they are ours.

NOTES

1. The poems have been edited by Nigel Smith, *The Poems of Andrew Marvell* (Harlow, 2003, rev. edn 2007), for the Longman Annotated English Poets series; the polemical works have been edited by Annabel Patterson with Martin Dzelzainis, Nicholas von Maltzahn, and N.H. Keeble as *The Prose Works of Andrew Marvell* for Yale University Press (New Haven, 2003).
2. On Restoration politics and religion see, for example, John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Harlow, 2000); John Spurr, *England in the 1670s: 'This Masquerading Age'* (Oxford, 2000); Tim Harris, *Charles II and His Kingdoms, 1660–1685* (London, 2005); Annabel Patterson, *The Long Parliament of Charles II* (New Haven, 2008).
3. On writing culture see Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1993); and as well his *English Clandestine Satire, 1660–1702* (Oxford, 2004).
4. Most famously and accessibly in 'What Is an Author?' in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Cornell, 1977), 113–38.
5. The classic new historicist exploration of authorial agency is Stephen Greenblatt's *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley, 1989); see also Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Cornell, 1985).
6. For a foundational expression of what became known as discourse analysis, see J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975).
7. The impulse to recover authorship is evident, for instance, in Paul Seaver's fascinating recovery of an early modern artisan's mentality, *Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford, 1987). See also Germaine Greer, *Kissing the Rod: An Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Women's Verse* (New York, 1988), one of the earliest and most influential anthologies of early modern women's literary voices.
8. Love, *Clandestine Satire*.

Further reading

Editions

The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, rev. Pierre Legouis with E. E. Duncan-Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1971). This remains the classic, original spelling edition of Marvell's poems and the only modern edition of his letters. The canon of Marvellian texts has shifted slightly over the years.

The Poems of Andrew Marvell, ed. Nigel Smith (Harlow, 2003; rev. edn 2007), is now the fullest and most fully annotated edition of Marvell's poetry; it is further

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distinguished from Margoliouth and Legouis in its modernization of spelling and accidentals.

The Prose Works of Andrew Marvell ed. Annabel Patterson, with Martin Dzelzainis, Nicholas von Maltzahn and N. H. Keeble, 2 vols. (New Haven, 2003); the only complete modern edition of Marvell's prose, fully introduced and annotated.

Criticism

T. S. Eliot, 'Andrew Marvell', first published in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 31 March 1921, repr. in *The Selected Prose Works of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York, 1975).

M. C. Bradbrook and M. G. Lloyd Thomas, *Andrew Marvell* (Cambridge, 1940).

Pierre Legouis, *Andrew Marvell: Poet, Puritan, Patriot* (Oxford, 1965); originally published as *André Marvell: Poète, Puritain, Patriote, 1621–1678* (Paris and London, 1928).

J. B. Leishman, *The Art of Marvell's Poetry* (London, 1968).

John M. Wallace, *Destiny His Choice: The Loyalism of Andrew Marvell* (Cambridge, 1968).

Rosalie Colie, 'My Echoing Song': *Andrew Marvell's Poetry of Criticism* (Princeton, 1970).

Donald Friedman, *Marvell's Pastoral Art* (Berkeley, 1970).

R. I. V. Hodge, *Foreshortened Time: Andrew Marvell and Seventeenth-Century Revolutions* (Cambridge, 1978).

Hilton Kelliher, compiler, *Andrew Marvell, Poet & Politician, 1621–1678: An Exhibition to Commemorate the Tercentenary of His Death* (London, 1978).

Annabel Patterson, *Marvell and the Civic Crown* (Princeton, 1978).

Warren Chernaik, *The Poet's Time: Politics and Religion in the Poetry of Andrew Marvell* (Cambridge, 1983).

and Martin Dzelzainis, eds., *Marvell and Liberty* (New York, 1999).

Derek Hirst and Steven N. Zwicker, 'High Summer at Nun Appleton, 1651: Andrew Marvell and Lord Fairfax's Occasions', *Historical Journal* 36 (1993), 247–69.

'Eros and Abuse: Imagining Andrew Marvell', *English Literary History* 74 (2007), 371–95.

Paul Hammond, 'Marvell's Sexuality', *The Seventeenth Century* 11 (1996), 87–123.

David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric, and Politics, 1627–1660* (Cambridge, 1999).

Nicholas von Maltzahn, *An Andrew Marvell Chronology* (Basingstoke, 2005).

Blair Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England* (Oxford, 2007).

Nicholas McDowell, *Poetry and Allegiance in the English Civil Wars: Marvell and the Cause of Wit* (Oxford, 2008).

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JAMES LOXLEY

The social modes of Marvell's poetry

Marvell once confessed that he was 'naturally . . . inclined to keep my thoughts private' (*Letters*, 166). Many readers over the years have discerned this private figure, reserved though not that austere, moving alone through the self-reflecting worlds of his lyric poetry. *The Garden* finds the Fall in the moment when the original self has to make room for another, rather than in any dalliance with tempting fruit: the human tragedy, it seems, lies in our not being able or permitted to live alone. No wonder, then, that Marvell 'can seem a spokesman for solitariness'. This is the poet as Richard Lovelace's emblematic snail, 'within [his] own self curl'd', and given also to the formal as well as thematic recreation of such tight self-enclosure in his verse.¹ A private, solitary, reflective Marvell has sometimes been separated as cleanly as possible – chronologically – from the Marvell who was a prose controversialist and Member of Parliament during the last two decades of his life.

But *The Garden* may have been written during the earlier of those two decades, and Marvell admitted his inclination to privacy in one of the regular letters concerning public events at Westminster he sent to the civic leadership of Hull: this is a strangely open intimacy, mirroring the intimate publicness of his unprinted and not extensively circulated early political poems. Clearly, solitariness and social engagement, private and public realms and writings, are closely and often perplexingly intertwined in his work. We should perhaps not seek to simplify this by seeing him as a writer for whom 'busy companies of men' (*The Garden*, line 12) figure only as a distraction or departure from the pursuit of a good and literary life. In another letter, this time addressed to an old parliamentary friend, Sir John Trott, after the death of a son, Marvell suggests three prime sources of consolation 'that may strengthen and assist' Trott in his grief. Together with 'the word of God' and 'the books of the Ancients' – deep reservoirs on which to draw, but principally matter for private study or contemplation – he also recommends 'the society of good men', and differentiates this in turn from the lesser help offered by 'diversion, business and activity' (*Letters*, 312–13). Clearly, society to Marvell is not just

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where fallen humanity unfortunately finds itself, but is instead a site of human flourishing, a place in which we are at home, and a resource to which we can turn in our most troubled moments.

Whatever its thematic claims, even some of Marvell's more solipsistic verse is marked by this sense of a vital sociality. His poetic career does not unfold or develop according to some immanent logic, either formal or subjective, towards an end which was all along its own, even if it can be shown to return repeatedly to particular generic, stylistic and thematic possibilities. It is instead determined, if that is not too strong a word, by the contexts, occasions and relationships with others in which poetry was deemed possible, decorous, or necessary. Proper names, from Richard Flecknoe (*Flecknoe, an English Priest at Rome*) to Archibald Douglas (*Last Instructions to a Painter*) via Robert Witty (*To His Worthy Friend Doctor Witty upon His Translation of the Popular Errors*) and Oliver Cromwell (*An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland*, *The First Anniversary of the Government under His Highness the Lord Protector*, *A Poem upon the Death of his Late Highness the Lord Protector*), emerge to offer themselves as interlocutors, addressees and focuses of attention; his social relationships, too, shape his engagements with landscape, most notably in the case of the Fairfax family and their estate at Nun Appleton. Marvell's social roles and exchanges surely inflect his poetry; indeed, we might think of his verse as their preserved remainder. The tempting thought that it *might* be such a remainder, and that even those poems that do not sing of their occasion might yet reveal the social context and conventions shaping their composition, drives on much literary-historical work. But although we are not necessarily seeking, as the pioneering historicist critic John Wallace was, a consistent Marvell either behind or within the whole corpus (a historicist version of a formalist ideal, perhaps), its poetic and political discontinuities have not lost their sometimes disorientating awkwardness for historically minded critics.² We are still often seeking to answer the question of what Marvell was pragmatically *doing* in writing this or that poem, and to address the issue of why these poems differ so starkly from predecessors or successors. However, since the poems seem to lack a consistent persona or authorial position, the social matrix of their production is essential to any account of that pragmatic endeavour.

Those proper names, and what we know of the poems' publication or circulation before the appearance of the posthumous collection of 1681, give us something to go on. From these details we can concoct the plausible narrative of a journey from the literary circles of 1630s Cambridge, circles which incorporated official occasions for the writing of both vernacular and neo-Latin verse, through the 'poetical academy' of the aristocratic Villiers brothers in Rome after the outbreak of civil war, and back to the sophisticated wits and

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royalist literary underground of 1640s London. In the following decade Marvell is to be found in attendance on the family of Lord Fairfax, the erstwhile commander of the New Model Army, and then as tutor to William Dutton, a young man entrusted to Cromwell's care. He established a place for himself in the public literary culture of the early Protectorate, and his rhetorical and linguistic skills led to salaried employment in government service. His subsequent career as an MP was accompanied by participation in oppositional coffee house culture and in another literary underground, this time rather more radical. Significantly, this is not just a narrative of a social life to which poetry is incidental, or which it merely records: rather, at all points on the journey verse is an element of the social exchange in which Marvell engages. For this reason, detailing the history of Marvell's poetic career, from this perspective, necessarily involves reference to the practices of literary production and circulation within which he was writing, practices which are not to be isolated from the rest of social and institutional life but are instead continuous with it. As even this brief outline of Marvell's movements suggests, though, no appeal to a general or non-specific sense of literary community, or to a simple model of the literary circle, will prove particularly illuminating. We are clearly looking at different modes or forms of sociality, found in particular configurations and ever-various relations to what lies beyond them. As Judith Scherer Herz has argued, when we talk of the literary circles or communities of this period,

sometimes we are talking of lived spaces – houses, taverns, universities, Inns of Court, theatres – at other times, of the structure of social relations and gender relations; of brothers, sisters, cousins; of friendship, love, and conversation (in its sexual sense, as well); of patronage and politics; and of intellectual networks and religious affiliations. We are, too, talking of textual spaces: of title pages, of dedicatory poems and epistles, of circles and circulation, and of issues of genre.³

Paying attention to such differences will help us to flesh out the narrative of Marvell's poetic movements. However, it will also demonstrate the difficulties inhering in the critical resort to forms of social context as a basis for reading or interpretation, difficulties that Marvell's poetry to some extent acknowledges and exploits. If Marvell's poetry is the object of our critical attention it is also, in Rosalie Colie's enduring phrase, a 'poetry of criticism', a mode of verse writing that both meditates on and works through its own nature and function as poetry.⁴ This is a form of self-reflexivity that makes it not so much monadic, sufficient unto and closed upon itself, as awkwardly alive to its readers and methodologically provocative, now, to both critics and historians.

Marvell's earliest surviving works were written for a volume of Greek and Latin poetry produced in 1637 by Cambridge University to celebrate the birth