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Marvell as Miltonist

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Marvell's commendations of Milton prove him a perceptive critic of the Latin prose and the epic verse. Not merely summarizing the content or intoning conventional praise, he invents a *structural* or *architectonic* mode of reading, articulates a subjective and emotional reader-response, connects Milton and the sublime for the first time, and evokes ancient models particularly significant for Milton. The 1654 letter comparing Milton's *Defensio Secunda* to Trajan's Column, turning and simultaneously rising to a higher "Scale," endorses Milton's own claim that it is a canonical work of epic stature. Marvell's architectural imagery, expanded from Milton's own *Areopagitica*, applies also to Cromwell's use of dissidents as cross-bracing, "Fastening the Contignation which they thwart." The commendatory poem to the 1674 edition of *Paradise Lost* again incorporates what seems at first to "thwart" the whole project. Here the significant intertext is *De Rerum Natura* by the notorious "atheist" Lucretius—the "strong" but dangerous poet who had already done what Marvell fears Milton might do: "ruin the sacred Truths." Lucretian allusion expands to define the emotional and aesthetic impact of *Paradise Lost*, anticipating the "terror without danger" at the core of Burke's Sublime. (The keyword "sublime" becomes the end-rhyme of Marvell's penultimate line.) Lucretius, awestruck by his philosophical mentor Epicurus, is "seized by *divina voluptas* and *horror*"; Marvell, yielding to the contradictory "gravity and ease" of Milton's poetry but also asserting his own aesthetic, exclaims that "at once delight and horror on us seize."



The crossest Spirits here do take their part,
 Fast'ning the Contignation which they thwart
*The First Anniversary of the Government under O. C.*¹

At once delight and horroure on us seize,
 Thou singst with so much gravity and ease
 "On Paradise Lost"²

... there are many *Miltons* in this one Man
*The Transproser Rehears'd*³

Marvell's literary relations with Milton span at least twenty years, and probably much longer. Scholars debate whether this was a "straightforward" friendship or one strained by rivalry, distance and distaste.⁴ But the relationship is certainly documented, in letters, in House of Commons records, in the *Rehearsal Transpros'd* controversies, and in the unique English commendatory poem "On Paradise Lost" (1674). Historians have mined these sources to reconstruct Marvell's political affiliations; Blair Worden, notably, situates him in relation to Marchamont Nedham as well as Milton himself. Circumstances date their acquaintance even earlier than Milton's hyperbolic letter of February 1653 to Lord Bradshaw, which recommends "Mr Marvile" as by far the best Assistant Secretary for the Foreign Tongues, as he knows from direct "converse" as well as "report": Edward Phillips records Marvell among the "particular Friends" who frequented the house in Petty France where Milton moved in 1651; Cyriack Skinner's mother moved in Marvell's circle; Skinner's aunt felt sure that Marvell had worked

¹ Except where noted below, all citations of Marvell come from *Poems and Letters*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, 3rd ed., rev. by Pierre Legouis and E.E. Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), lines 89–90. Oxford Scholarly Editions Online. Line numbers appear in parentheses.

² *Paradise Lost, a Poem in Twelve Books*, 2nd ed. (London, 1674), lines 35–6. EEBO. My citations from "On Paradise Lost" come from the 1674 edition of Milton's poem rather than the 1681 text used by Margoliouth.

³ *The Transproser Rehears'd* (London, 1673), 147. This anonymous work has been attributed to Samuel Parker, Richard Leigh or Samuel Butler.

⁴ John McWilliams, "Marvell and Milton's Literary Friendship Reconsidered," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 46, no. 1 (Winter, 2006): 155–6, 172–3. See also Matthew C. Augustine, "The Chameleon or the Sponge? Marvell, Milton, and the Politics of Literary History," *Studies in Philology* 111 (2014): 132–62 (focused on the *Rehearsal Transposed* controversies, not discussed in this article since they are not directly focused on Marvell's *literary* response to Milton); John Rogers, "Ruin the Sacred Truths: Prophecy, Form, and Nonconformity in Marvell and Milton," in *The Oxford Handbook of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Martin Dzelzainis and Edward Holberton (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 673–4; and Stephen N. Zwicker, "'Let Us Now Praise Famous Men': Andrew Marvell and the Problem of Panegyric," in *Imagining Andrew Marvell at 400*, ed. Matthew C. Augustine, Giulio J. Pertile, and Steven N. Zwicker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 67–70. This essay has been developed from papers I gave at the North-East meeting, American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, University of Toronto, 1979, and the South Central Renaissance Conference, Berkeley, 2023. My thanks to two *Marvell Studies* reviewers for clarifying suggestions.

with Milton on *Eikonoklastes*—and even if this was a mistake for the *First Defense*, it would certainly predate the Bradshaw letter.⁵ Literary specialists have built around this documentary core a mass of Miltonic echoes discovered in Marvell’s verse, surprisingly numerous given the two poets’ obvious differences in style and sensibility. The prickly plant Conscience tended by Fairfax resembles the prickly plant haemony in “Comus,” for example. *Lycidas* and “On Paradise Lost” both dally with false “surmise,” “beaked promontories” loom in *Lycidas* and the *First Anniversary*, where the dragon who “swinges the volumes of its horrid” tail comes straight from the Nativity Ode.⁶ Biographers infer that “the ‘Character of Holland’ seems to imagine Milton among its close circle of initial readers and strategically echoes Milton’s poetry and prose.”⁷ Estelle Haan proposes that the influence went both ways, from the start. Marvell seems to have invented the witty comparison of rhyming to “tagging” the points of a doublet, so Milton was quoting *him* when he gave Dryden leave to tag his verses.⁸

Literary historians tend to interpret these echoes and interactions as anything but literature—as allegories of the political situation, disagreements about a state church settlement, a critique of enthusiasm, or (above all) evidence of Marvell’s personal feelings, resentments and rejections of Milton.⁹ This essay will focus more narrowly on *how* Marvell read Milton, first in the correspondence and then in the 1674 prefatory poem, where I find a “web” or network of unobtrusive but keenly observed allusions to Milton’s writings both public and private. In particular, I identify in that poem intertextual echoes of works proscribed in the Restoration—Milton’s revolutionary polemics, Marvell’s poems in praise of Fairfax and Cromwell—and the scarcely less scandalous Lucretius. The younger poet’s intimacy with Milton’s own concerns and expressions goes deeper than mere acquaintance with the printed work. I should point

⁵ John Milton, *Epistolarum Familiarium Liber Unus and Uncollected Letters*, ed. Estelle Haan (Louvain: Louvain University Press, 2019), 475, and see 469 n. 3, 473; Blair Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England: John Milton, Andrew Marvell, Marchamont Nedham* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 33, 83, and ch. 4 *passim*; Nigel Smith, *Andrew Marvell, the Chameleon* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 39, 45–6, 106–7, 125, 163.

⁶ See John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 89–94, and “Ruin the Sacred Truths,” 675–7; Haan, *Epistolarum*, 472nn19–20; and Kenneth Gross, “‘Pardon Me, Mighty Poet’: Versions of the Bard in Marvell’s ‘On Mr. Milton’s Paradise Lost,’” *Milton Studies* 16 (1982): 86–8.

⁷ Matthew C. Augustine, *Andrew Marvell: a Literary Life* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 139 (drawing on Nicholas von Maltzahn’s *Chronology*), 141. Augustine’s biography also cites numerous Miltonic echoes.

⁸ Haan, *Epistolarum*, 474; *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Nigel Smith (London: Pearson/Longman, 2003), 180 (rhyme as “tagging of points in a Garrett”).

⁹ See, for example, Sharon Achinstein, “Milton’s Spectre in the Restoration: Marvell, Dryden, and Literary Enthusiasm,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (1997): 1–29; David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric, and Politics, 1627–1660* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 491–3; Philip Connell, “Marvell, Milton, and the Protectoral Church Settlement,” *Review of English Studies* 62, no. 256 (2011): 562–93.

out at the start, however, that this is an asymmetrical study focused for readers of this specialist journal: We do not know how Milton read Marvell, except for the actual letters (composed in his head and dictated) that I analyze here, which never mention poetry among the accomplishments of “Mr Marvile.”

Though I speculate occasionally that Marvell read his lines on Fairfax and Cromwell to Milton, and that Milton responded, my argument does not depend on it. I propose “significant intertexts” here, but they resonate *within* Marvell’s own oeuvre. In particular, I build on the analysis of *Upon Appleton House* in my 1979 book *The Politics of Landscape*, where I link it to the state-building passage in the *First Anniversary*. The peculiar position of Fairfax, withdrawn from national affairs and facing the demise of his dynasty because only one daughter survives, is expressed topographically and rhetorically by valuing the oblique and diagonal over conventional “straightforwardness” or “usual progression”: the fate of Fairfax’s “house” is to “to progress through obliquity, to go forward by slipping sideways,” via meandering walks, slant perspectives, scenes that “turn with Engines strange” or become a painted Traverse,” attributes “crossed over” and lineage “translated.” Architectural imagery connects the Fairfax estate and the Cromwellian state, built on the same principle of controlled obliquity so that “the crossest spirits” actually strengthen it, “fast’ning the contignation which they thwart” —a passage that I place as an epigraph here.¹⁰

Marvell’s two commendations of Milton reveal him to be a most perceptive critic of the Latin prose as well as the epic verse, exemplifying sophisticated literary responses that go beyond the traditional focus on edifying subject-matter and rhetorical grandeur. I propose that Marvell invents a structural and architectonic mode of reading, that he articulates a subjective and emotional reader-response, and that he is the first to make explicit Milton’s vital connection to the sublime. Delight and horror seize on him — and “us.” As he constructs Milton in this way, he combines deferential canonization and critical self-assertion, “aemulating” his senior colleague in both senses of the word.

Exactly how these two opposing impulses play out has been fiercely debated by Marvell specialists and historians of the English Revolution. And these debates are further complicated by the apparent elusivity of Marvell himself, the “Machiavellian” or “chameleon.” There are many Miltons in this one man — and many Marvells too. Joanna Picciotto, drawing on the Restoration polemics, remarks that “Marvell released a transpersonal phantasmagoria so protean that it actually earned him the nickname ‘Trans’,” and Matthew Augustine’s biography applies Picciotto’s observation globally:

¹⁰ Turner, *The Politics of Landscape: Rural Scenery and Society in English Poetry, 1630–1660* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, and Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 64–83; the turning scenic “Engines” (Marvell, *Upon Appleton House* [385]) are the *periaktoi* of the ancient theatre as described in Vitruvius.

“Marvell’s whole poetic may be summed up in the Latin prefix *trans*—crossing from one place, person, thing, or state to another.”¹¹ Augustine’s Marvell is all “genuine perplexities,” “threatening indeterminacy,” or “plasticity,” and he is severe on those like Christopher Hill, Annabel Patterson, and even Nigel Smith who simplify our poet into a heroic progressive or a perfect “disciple” of Milton.¹² Yet this revisionism can veer at times into an equally reductive characterization of Marvell, bristling with “irony and passive aggression,” “chafing,” and “winking.”¹³ By tightening the focus on specific textual responses and constructions, I hope to avoid such pitfalls.

1653: Milton sends a letter of recommendation

Already by February 1653, Milton felt confident enough to recommend Marvell for state employment alongside himself. “Mr Marvile,” he assured President Bradshaw, is

a man whom both by report, and the converse I have had with him, of singular desert for the state to make use of; who alsoe offers himselfe, if there be any employment for him. His father was the Minister of Hull and he hath spent foure yeares abroad in Holland, France, Italy, and Spaine, to very good purpose, as I beleeve, and the gaineing of those 4 languages; besides he is a scholler and well read in the latin and Greeke authors, and noe doubt of an approved conversation, for he com’s now lately out of the house of the Lord Fairefax who was Generall, where he was intrusted to give some instructions in the Languages to the Lady his Daughter.¹⁴

Adding that he is “no doubt of an approved conversation” might seem to contradict Milton’s claim that his recommendation is reliably based on “the converse I have had with him,” and has been misinterpreted as evidence that they hardly knew each other.¹⁵

¹¹ Joanna Picciotto, “Truth-Telling, Mass Media, and the Poet’s Office,” *ELH* 87, no. 2 (2020): 388; Augustine, *Life*, 4.

¹² Augustine, *Life*, 138, 139, 188 (“the heroic narrative of principled resistance to absolutism still sounds at times in Smith’s account: when we come to the quick, ‘Marvell stands for liberty—liberty of the subject, liberty in the state, liberty of the self, liberty from political and personal tyrannies’ (*Chameleon*, 343). In this final chapter, I want to stand back from this tradition and allow into view the genuine perplexities of Marvell’s negotiating of toleration and sovereignty”). For repeated attacks on Annabel Patterson’s view of Marvell as a “liberal” and Christopher Hill’s description of him as Milton’s “disciple,” based on Hill’s “Milton and Marvell,” in *Approaches to Marvell: The York Tercentenary Lectures*, ed. C. A. Patrides (London: Routledge, 1978), 1–30, see 187, 209–14. Hill was indeed impatient with the subtleties of literary theory and criticism (personal communications, 1985–1995). See his review of *Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton’s Prose*, ed. David Loewenstein and James Grantham Turner, *The English Historical Review* 106 (1991): 399–401. In the edifice of Marvell studies, as in Cromwell’s government, “the crossest spirits ...fasten the contignation which they thwart.

¹³ Augustine, *Life*, 210, 212.

¹⁴ Haan, *Epistolarum*, 475.

¹⁵ See McWilliams, “Marvell and Milton,” 157 (“despite the fact that Milton claims to have had ‘converse with him,’ his subsequent assertion that Marvell is ‘noe doubt of an approved conversation’ suggests that his personal knowledge

But this is Puritan-speak, referring not to *conversation* in the modern sense but to the godliness and good behavior of this forward youth who has just graduated from “the discipline severe / Of Fairfax and the starry Vere” (*Upon Appleton House*, 723–4); Milton is assuring Bradshaw that he found no reason to doubt Marvell’s commitment to the new regime.¹⁶ There is a worldly and practical element, too: Milton does not merely list the countries on Marvell’s Grand Tour, but vouches for his responsible use of those travels, “to very good purpose, as I believe.” Milton would not have based this judgment on mere “report.” It is unlikely that Marvell mentioned his years in the Fairfax household only briefly, without being asked for a detailed account of his experiences and impressions. Vouching for Marvell’s scholarship and fluency in *six languages* must again have been based on long and testing oral “converse,” given Milton’s scorn for linguistic deficiencies in others (and the crucial need for proficiency in the Office of Foreign Tongues). Even Augustine, committed to a revisionist model of rupture and rejection, confirms that before Milton generated his letter of recommendation “it seems likely that there was sustained contact between the two men” (*Life*, 139).

How then does Milton construct Marvell? The qualities he emphasizes go well beyond the competence or diligence expected in a mere assistant. Despite the rather sinister spelling of his name (due to an amanuensis, perhaps jealous of a junior’s preferment) Marvell is in a class of his own; his desert is “singular,” superlative. Though Marvell would be an “assistant in the performance of my place” he would not be a mere underling, but rather a “coadjutor.” He would *assist* in the literal, etymological sense where Milton could no longer: the “performance” of the office required meeting and conversing with foreign Ambassadors, and “it would be hard for [the Council of State] to find a Man soe fit every way for that purpose as this Gentleman.”¹⁷ This must be emphasized, because biographers sometimes imagine a Dickensian scenario with Marvell as the downtrodden junior, resentful of Milton taking the credit for his work.¹⁸

Worden finds Milton’s letter to Bradshaw somewhat cagey, omitting any mention of Marvell’s dubious role in the embassy to Sweden, and he speculates that it was written as an impersonal public document, intended to be read by other eyes too. This historian adds that the foreign tongues job was not in Bradshaw’s gift anyway, and Marvell himself sensed that His Lordship was distressed rather than flattered by Milton’s demand, as we

of Marvell is not especially detailed”); and John Creaser, “Prosody and Liberty in Milton and Marvell,” in *Milton and the Terms of Liberty*, ed. Graham Parry and Joad Raymond (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), 50: “Milton’s letter of recommendation reveals he then had little first-hand knowledge of Marvell.”

¹⁶ See OED s.v. “conversation” (n.) 1 (“figurative of one’s spiritual being”). and 6.

¹⁷ Haan, *Epistolarum*, 475.

¹⁸ Augustine, *Life*, 209–10.

will see.¹⁹ This is broadly true, but I would also emphasize the personal element in this 1653 letter. There is, of course, a certain danger in identifying a “personal voice” in texts of this (or any) period. I certainly would not want to fall back into a simplistic dichotomy of the personal and the conventional, or the circular argument that Milton and Marvell must have been close familiars because their writings about each other sound familiar; we are dealing with a performance or “production of intimacy,” a personality-effect as an old-fashioned postmodernist might put it. Nevertheless, it would be irresponsible (not to mention tone-deaf) to ignore such effects. This letter is the only place where Milton applies the common phrase “I confesse” to a deficiency in himself, admitting that his blindness makes him “not fit for” diplomatic “performance.”²⁰ He even hints that Marvell’s talents are strong enough to trigger “Jealousies” and “aemulation” in himself, thirteen years his senior. He “lays aside” such feelings but at the same time manifests them in the text at a climactic point, leaving the door open for future scholars to trace the two-way anxiety of influence.

1654: Marvell promotes Milton’s *Second Defense*

On 2 June 1654 Marvell reports on presenting a letter and a copy of *Defensio Secunda* to Bradshaw, and compares Milton’s ferocious Latin polemic to one of the greatest extant monuments of ancient Roman triumphalism: “When I consider how equally it turnes and rises with so many figures, it seems to me a Trajans colume in whose winding ascent we see imboss’d the severall Monuments of your learned victoryes.”²¹ On one level this may be a pun on *tour de force*, but the simile offers much more. Marvell bonds with his “most honoured Freind John Milton” by recalling a specific and extremely famous monument that each must have seen on their respective Italian tours. By calling the column’s figures “imboss’d” he conveys eye-witness experience, since the three-dimensional projection of its reliefs is hard to gather from an engraving or a second-hand verbal account. The entire letter shows that, even though he has not yet been awarded the secretary’s job, Marvell is already in full “performance” as the “coadjutor” connecting the overworked Bradshaw and the blind Milton. As we will see

¹⁹ Worden, *Literature and Politics*, Appendix A.

²⁰ The phrase “I [must] confess[e]” appears sometimes in the polemic prose, but in a more neutral sense similar to *recognize*, and never linked to any admission of failure on Milton’s part.

²¹ Letter 2, *Poems and Letters*, 305–6. Duncan-Jones’s note explains the bookish elements of the Column, while Norbrook (*Writing the English Republic*, 337) relates this letter to Pliny’s account of Trajan himself. Though recorded by *OED* only from 1802, its initial quotes suggest that *tour de force* was an established French idiom (and Milton had included French among Marvell’s youthful accomplishments); though *tour* in this instance means a turn or feat, the English phrase “tower of strength” was familiar from the *Book of Common Prayer* onwards (*OED*, s.v. “tower” [n.] 1).

in the next section, Milton's 1657 correspondence with Oldenburg proves that Marvell, *familiaris meus*, went on to do this promotion-work in France, to great acclaim.

Marvell was not a mere messenger but a literary agent and interpreter. In Bradshaw's presence he had summarized the *Defense* as concisely as possible, as we gather from his brief summary of what was described in an earlier message (now lost). This extant second letter interprets Bradshaw's reaction so as to "satisfy" the original sender. Displaying his credentials as a diplomat and perhaps a spy, Marvell scrutinizes Bradshaw's surface demeanor for signs of suppressed anxieties and secret agendas. Adapting his epistolary "performance" to suggest personal intimacy, he slips in a confidential aside for Milton's ears only: "to tell you truly mine own Imagination," Bradshaw probably feigned haste because he feared that Milton had sent another importunate letter of recommendation for the bearer, Marvell himself. "Imagination" is applied to reality rather than fiction.

As he recounts how he presented the *Defensio Secunda* to the somewhat bewildered and distracted recipient Bradshaw, Marvell exercises his gift as a miniaturist, encapsulating the essence of the book in "so cursory a Review and so sudden an Account as He could then have of it from me." (We might say he "imbosses" Milton's treatise, concentrating it by reducing the surface area but increasing the pressure.) Haan argues that Milton's prose eulogy of Queen Christina in the *Second Defense* "may suggest Milton's knowledge of Marvell's 'Letter to Dr Ingelo'" rather than Marvell's debt to Milton in that poem, and Augustine suggests, citing Philip Connell, that the younger poet "may even have had a hand in polishing Milton's Latin tract for the press."²² If so, then Marvell would be delivering a part of himself in the volume he delivered to Bradshaw; no wonder he promised to learn the entire book "by Heart." Intriguingly, Marvell's ability to summarize and compress was turned against him in the vitriolic *Transproser Rehears'd*: his polemic is *Areopagitica* in shorthand, "*iconoclastes* drawn in Little, and *Defensio Populi Anglicana* in Miniature, ... there are many Miltons in this one Man."²³ Take away the hostility, and this is an accurate critical observation—therefore adopted as an epigraph above.

To double business bound, Marvell declares that he needed two letters to give full "satisfaction" about the reception of those two important items sent by Milton. As with "Heart," the key word "satisfy" could be a mere commonplace, but here it becomes a crucial element in the production of intimacy, conveying an emotional charge beyond mere politeness or deference. It recurs throughout the letter, which begins by explaining that "I did not satisfie my self in the Account I gave you of presenting your Book to my

²² Haan, *Epistolarum*, 474; Augustine, *Life*, 142.

²³ *Transproser Rehears'd*, 72, 131, 147. These phrases are frequently cited, for example in McWilliams, "Marvell and Milton," 161 and Achinstein, "Milton's Spectre," 2.

Lord,” because in the rush “I did not give you satisfaction neither”; Marvell’s completed assignment must match the standards of the young reporter as well as the older instigator to whom he reports, and it is only complete when he assures Milton that Bradshaw “did then witness all Respect to your person, and as much *satisfaction* concerning your work as could be expected” (my emphasis). This significant idea thus cycles through the first, second and third persons—applied first to Marvell himself, then to Milton, then to Bradshaw—and the equally emotive keyword “affectionate” appears twice near the end, defining the passionate interests of the writer. Marvell has “an affectionate Curiosity” about the radical officer and Hull patriot Richard Overton, and then signs off as Milton’s “most affectionate humble Servant.” This *affection* might of course be the conventional language of epistolary compliment, like the declarations of humility, the deprecation of his own judgement, or the apologetic “pardon me”—which will recur, with far greater emphasis, in Marvell’s poetic addresses to Cromwell and to the author of *Paradise Lost*, in both cases opening a stately pentameter line and promoting himself as one privileged to address a “great Prince” and a “Mighty Poet.”²⁴ But in the entire corpus of Milton’s *Epistolae* edited by Haan the root *affect-* or *affectionis-* occurs precisely never, so we are not dealing with mere convention. Marvell would later adopt this word into his standard formula for signing off a letter, but this is the first time he does so; I propose that he is deliberately echoing the unique instance when Milton uses it this way, to close the epistle to Parliament that introduced his translation of Bucer on divorce.²⁵ These honorific but also heartfelt *sprezzatura*-gestures flatter both Milton and the writer himself, echoing the “singular” praise that Marvell evidently gleaned from a shared copy of the recommendation letter; writer and recipient are both in a class of their own,

there being none who doth if I may so say more zealously honour you th[a]n
Honoured Sir
Your most affectionate humble Servant,
Andrew Marvell

Zealous and *jealous* were at the time related, even occasionally interchangeable, and immediately before this final flourish Marvell admitted his “envie” at Cyriack Skinner’s “Happiness.” Here he echoes and exorcizes the “Jealousies” that troubled Milton’s recommendation the year before.²⁶

²⁴ *First Anniversary*, 395; “On *Paradise Lost*,” 23. Bradshaw and Overton had both been singled out for praise in Milton’s treatise.

²⁵ Milton, *The Judgment of Martin Bucer*, in *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 2, ed. Ernest Sirluck (New York: Yale University Press, and London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 440.

²⁶ “Affectionate” later entered the sign-off formula for all Marvell’s letters, but letter 2 is the earliest, and his previous letter to Cromwell did not include that word. *OED* lists a number of obsolete definitions of “jealous” meaning fervent emotion, including but not limited to envy. See *OED*, s.v. “jealous” (*adj.*) 1.b: “Devoted, eager, zealous.” This meaning is correctly

In this 1654 letter the uniquely “zealous” and “affectionate” younger poet and future colleague acknowledges the honor of receiving his own presentation-copy of the *Second Defense* direct from the author, and returns the favor with a compact “cursory Review” or “sudden Account” of that mighty work. Marvell’s promise to get the book “by Heart” strikes John McWilliams as too servile, making him Milton’s “parrot,” but this actually refers to intense study and devotion rather than mechanical replication, while the “Review” itself reveals a sharp, independent mind.²⁷ As experts have noted, Trajan commissioned his column as a gigantic double book-scroll situated between two libraries, and Marvell wittily turns Milton’s book into a column. He condenses here several tropes for praising a work of literature. Turning and rising is exactly what Aristotle said a tragedy should do, but Marvell makes this idea concrete and marble, then replicates it “drawn in Little”: Warren Chernaik observes that, by “imitating in English the ‘winding’, highly metaphorical style and syntax of Milton’s Latin, Marvell is both accepting a subordinate position and demonstrating his own skills, his own credentials.”²⁸ The old topos of the epic as a journey implied a relation between text and space, with a reader moving through it, and George Herbert’s *Temple* conceived the book of verse as a building—but Marvell transforms this conventional imagery by subsuming it into the real architecture of the mighty Column. By associating it with one of the most impressive surviving monuments of Antiquity he establishes the *Defensio Secunda* as a canonical work of heroic stature rather than a mere occasional polemic or “pamphlet,” reflecting back Milton’s claim, at the end of the *Defense* itself, that like “the Epic poet” he has created “a *testimonium*, I might almost say a *monumentum*.”²⁹

Leading up to the column simile itself, Marvell also calls this *Defense* “the most compendious Scale, for so much, to the Height of the Roman eloquence.” Though it is not clear what he means by “for so much,” the pun on scale/*scala* effectively conveys not only the awesome bulk of the treatise but its step-by-step ascent to the highest possible discourse; adding another layer, Marvell may also be echoing (and inverting) a passage in Milton’s treatise that praises Cromwell for eschewing personal power and declaring his willingness to humble or lower himself for the public good, “tot *gradibus*

illustrated from two early Bible translations, but the *OED*’s quotation from the 19th-century edition of Marvell’s 1 June 1661 letter to the Mayor of Hull, referring to rivals “as jealous in your service as I myselfe,” is wrong. Margoliouth correctly reads “zealous,” which is entirely clear in the original manuscript as Martin Taylor, City Archivist in the Hull History Centre, helpfully confirms (personal communication, 2023).

²⁷ McWilliams, “Marvell and Milton,” 159, 162.

²⁸ Chernaik, *Marvell and Milton, Poets in a Fallen World* (in progress), draft of ch. 1 kindly shared by the author.

²⁹ Milton, *Defensio Secunda*, in *The Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank Allen Patterson, vol. 8 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), 252. The online version of Margoliouth’s revised 3rd edition unintentionally makes Marvell’s column-simile even more epic by reading “Trojan’s Column.”

ex sublimi descendere,” to come down *by so many steps* from the top, literally “from the sublime.”³⁰ Perhaps both tourists had reminisced about climbing the 185-tread spiral staircase inside the column to reach the viewing platform, and perhaps Marvell had already read to Milton the dizzying effects of changing scale in *Upon Appleton House*, where the foreign architect’s brain becomes a giant vault (5–8), grass becomes a precipice (375), cows are beauty-spots seen in a looking-glass (457–60), and the larger structure of the poem is replicated in small details such as the “traverse” (419) or “scene that turns with engines strange” (385).³¹

We can only guess what the two poets might have shared during discussions of Fairfax and his unexpected retirement, but the text of the 1654 letter, with its column simile and its serious pun on scale, survives as concrete evidence “in miniature” of Marvell’s literary response and critical priorities. Significantly, Milton’s “scale” rises to heights of *eloquence*, not to elevated thoughts or truths; his focus is on the aesthetic achievement of the *Defensio Secunda*, not its subject matter. When he praises “how equally it turnes and rises with so many figures” he typically compresses two meanings—rhetorical ornaments and historical figures—but he identifies the latter only briefly, joking that Milton’s enemies Salmasius and Morus are as thoroughly defeated as the Dacian leader Decebalus conquered by Trajan, and will have been likewise “forced” to commit suicide. Otherwise he avoids flattering biography, pedantic detail, and summary of the argument, concentrating purely on the overall impact of the book. Marvell’s praise stands out for what it omits as well as what it articulates—and I propose below that the same is true of the published poem “On Paradise Lost.”

Marvell’s column analogy links this critical letter, conceptually if not verbally, to his most ambitious completed work and to the equally ambitious Cromwell poem that he was probably drafting, in anticipation of the first anniversary of the Protectorate. As I argued in *The Politics of Landscape* and reiterated above, *Upon Appleton House* and the *First Anniversary* share an underlying structure that replaces linearity with a more complex “parallelogram of forces.”³² Both those poems also reveal Marvell’s

³⁰ *Defensio Secunda*, 225 (my emphasis). Smith’s edition cites this passage to annotate *First Anniversary* line 222, but does not there relate it to Marvell’s 1654 letter. Norbrook (*Writing the English Republic*, 333) cites another place in the same *Defense* where Milton asserts that it would be “sublimior” (more sublime) for Queen Christina to abdicate than to rule.

³¹ See James Grantham Turner, “Marvell’s *Upon Appleton House*,” *The Explicator* 38, no. 3 (Spring, 1980): 21–4, and *Politics of Landscape*, 85, for the turning scenes (*periaktoi*).

³² Turner, *Politics of Landscape*, 78. Smith’s assumption that Marvell’s entire Cromwell poem was written after the 16 Dec. 1654 anniversary itself (thus composed and printed in barely one month) cannot be verified; though some episodes refer to events later than the June 1654 letter to Milton, such as Cromwell’s coach accident, the whole Amphion/building conceit derives from Waller’s c. 1638 poem on St Paul’s (see Smith, ed., *Poems*, note on line 284) and the Fifth Monarchist crisis flared up in Dec. 1653 (see Smith, ed., *Poems*, note to line 305).

unusually keen awareness of architectural theory and practice. The simile of Trajan's rising-and-turning column now brings Milton's *Defense* into relation with Fairfax's dynastic succession and Cromwell's new constitution – all three connected via the trope of progression-through-obliquity, manifested in the landscape architecture of the Appleton estate and the metaphoric architecture of the Commonwealth. And since that political construction is associated with the creative power of Amphion's lute, a serious pun inspired by Cromwell's "Instrument of Government," Marvell's ascending "Scale" may also invoke its musical meaning.

Marvell had explained the enigma of Fairfax's retirement, a topic that Milton also singles out in this very *Defense*, by celebrating "the Progress of [his] House's Fate" via apparent retreat, female succession, and the "arts of peace"; the transverse or retrocycling progression of the Fairfax estate is now as it were set on end, to become the spiraling-yet-static column.³³ And Marvell may have already composed the first main episode of his anniversary poem, the lines on Cromwell's 1653 Instrument of Government that expertly evoke the diagonal cross-bracing that allows architecture to rise to greater height. This passage adds a more precise knowledge of engineering to Milton's simile of the "house of God" in *Areopagitica*, where various-shaped stones that "cannot be united into a continuity," but can only "be contiguous," are held together by "brotherly dissimilitudes."³⁴ This becomes Marvell's figure for Cromwell's canny inclusion of the stubborn opposition; just as Trajan's Column soars and spirals at the same time, so here the most contrarian and divisive radicals actually "uphold" the masonry by locking it tighter:

The Common-wealth does through their Centers all
 Draw the Circumf'rence of the publique Wall;
 The crossest Spirits here do take their part,
 Fast'ning the Contignation which they thwart;
 And they whose Nature leads them to divide
 Uphold, this one, and that the other Side. (87–92)

Milton's *continuous* and *contiguous* contract into the powerful *contignation*. Where Milton saw "spiritual architecture" as it were from the outside, with "goodly and graceful

³³ Marvell, *Upon Appleton House*, lines 84, 283–4 (echoing "Horatian Ode" line 10), 385–6, 419.

³⁴ Milton, *Areopagitica*, in *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 2, 555: "when every stone is laid artfully together, it cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world; neither can every peece of the building be of one form; nay rather the perfection consists in this, that out of many moderat varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportionall arises the goodly and the gracefull symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure. Let us therefore be more considerat builders, more wise in spirituall architecture, when great reformation is expected." Rogers, "Ruin the Sacred Truths," 678–9, argues that Marvell's use of this passage in *First Anniversary* is a "critique" of Milton.

symmetry” as his sole criterion, Marvell climbs inside and checks out the structure. Problems of *fastening* and *contignation* were urgently studied in seventeenth-century Rome, where ambitious domes increasingly threatened to collapse due to excess lateral thrust; Marvell clearly has a dome-like rotunda more than a rectangular structure in mind, because these diagonal “thwarting” members combine to form “the *Circumference* of the publique Wall” —which is further strengthened by another feature that uses the same principle of circular construction to contain centrifugal force, namely “Arches” (88, 95).³⁵ This passage and the next, where Cromwell becomes a pair of cosmic compasses with one fixed “Foot” and the other swinging “the World” in a huge circle (99–100), strikingly anticipate the moment in *Paradise Lost* when Raphael describes the Son taking compasses, fixing one foot, drawing a circle in “the vast profunditie obscure,” and declaring “This be thy just Circumference, O World!”³⁶ Though both poets of course draw on a common stock of Creation-imagery, the temptation to catch Milton echoing Marvell is especially strong here.

1657: Marvell as Milton’s “familiar”

Two more letters from Marvell to Milton, sent from the Protestant city of Saumur, are lost but summarized by Milton himself when writing to Henry Oldenburg in the same French city. English expatriates and tourists gathered in Saumur, and Marvell himself spent many months there as tutor to Cromwell’s ward William Dutton. (Milton’s 1553 letter, we recall, had made much of the “good purpose” and linguistic proficiency that Marvell had acquired during an earlier tour of France.) The relevant passage occurs some way into Milton’s Latin epistle to Oldenburg, so first I need to establish its occasion and tone, to provide a context for the sudden appearance of Marvell, now promoted from “scholar” and “coadjutor” to full-blown *familiaris*.

The subtext is injured pride and seething resentment. Milton had just heard that his enemy Alexander More, far from committing suicide or appearing vanquished in Milton’s triumphal column as Marvell’s 1654 letter imagined, had been promoted to the greatest

³⁵ For structural problems in Roman domes, see Giovanni Poleni, *Memorie istoriche della gran cupola del tempio vaticano, e de’ danni di essa* (Padua: Stamperia del Seminario, 1748). I owe this reference to Martha Pollak.

³⁶ *Paradise Lost, a Poem in Twelve Books*, second edition (London, 1674), 7.225–31 (all further citations from this poem, by book and line, will use the abbreviation PL). A fainter echo of Marvell may occur when a more sinister building arises musically, like the air in “an Organ” (PL 1.708–12), Cromwell having like Amphion created different effects by applying “new Stopps” (*First Anniversary*, 58); OED s.v. “stop” (n.) III 15.b proves that the word could be used for fingering a lute, but 14.a shows that it was already associated with “Organs of sweet stop” (PL 7.596). Though we have no direct evidence of Milton knowing any actual poem by Marvell, the odds in the case of the *First Anniversary* are higher than most. The same official published this poem and Milton’s *Second Defense* (Augustine, *Life*, 143), and at least one scholar thinks that it was specifically intended for Milton, “as an oblique but urgent attempt to disarm the older poet’s objections to the Protector’s role” (Philip Connell, quoted in Augustine, *Life*, 153).

Protestant Temple in France. In a grisly pun that is also a “death-wish” laid upon More (as Haan aptly puts it), he quips that Charon’s ferry to Hades would be more appropriate for him than Charenton.³⁷ What Milton’s 1653 recommendation letter called “Jealousies” and “aemulation” surface when he complains that his despicable foe like other bad ministers “pleases the ears” of his gullible audience “most powerfully” (*aurium causa potissimum placent*). This anti-populist disgust had already erupted in his divorce tract, where the vile monster Custom draws multitudes of disciples because her discourse is “glib and easy.”³⁸ For solace, Milton then turns to enquire how Oldenburg is promoting his writings—that is, the very *Defensio Secunda* and *Pro Se Defensio* that had supposedly eliminated More. The news was not good. To mask his disappointment that Oldenburg has kept these inflammatory publications under cover and shown them “to nobody unless he asked for them” explicitly, Milton weaves in several passages from an urbane epistle by Horace (*Epistola* 1.19), which instructs a messenger to deliver his collected works to the Emperor Augustus himself—but only when his mood is most cheerful and receptive. Through that Horace parallel, which recurs in waves throughout this August 1657 letter, Milton feigns diffidence about his work but aligns himself with a most canonical poet—the kind of self-assertion through ironic self-deprecation typical of the modesty-topos.

Between these Horace citations, however, Milton drops the would-be playful irony and pointedly boasts of a much more successful moment in his reception-history among the Huguenots. In the same city of Saumur the previous year “a certain learned man, my *familiaris*,” had brought a copy of the *Second Defense* to publicize it, and reported that it aroused intense admiration and demand. (The non-classical verb that Milton uses here when paraphrasing Marvell, *expeti*, connotes fervent “seeking out,” appetite or desire.) Another letter from this “familiar” had confirmed that the *Defense* was delighting the learned men of Saumur “ut nihil supra”—a superlative translated by Haan “second to none” but with a stronger meaning, that nothing could be conceived *above* it, “nothing higher.” A cynic might propose that *NIHIL SUPRA* is Milton’s true motto.

This *vir doctus familiaris meus* is Marvell, beyond a doubt. He certainly was in Saumur at the time Milton indicates, as the tutor of “the Protector’s son-in-law” (to quote from the secret agent who reported him as “a notable English Italo-Machavillian”).³⁹ And we have seen how Milton already employed Marvell as a trusted literary ambassador and not merely a carrier or messenger. *Familiaris* signifies, not a servant, blood relative or casual friend, but an esteemed member of his élite circle: Pope Alexander VII, for

³⁷ Haan, *Epistolarum*, 326–32. All subsequent quotations will be from this text, *epistola* 24.

³⁸ Milton, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, in *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 2, 222. Augustine (*Life*, 151) assumes that Milton speaks “through what we might imagine to be clenched teeth.”

³⁹ James Scudamore, cited in Augustine, *Life*, 152. Dutton is “called by the French Le Genre du Protecteur” but in fact, though his “governor” Marvell tried to arrange his marriage to Frances Cromwell, nothing came of it.

example, identifies among the *familiares* of his illustrious ancestor Agostino Chigi the celebrated writer Pietro Aretino and numerous cardinals including Pietro Bembo.⁴⁰ Marvell was therefore one of the few individuals other than Queen Christina to whom Milton had granted the power to define him, to ratify his own status as *nihil supra*. Horace's running metaphor is that of a plebeian donkey-driver delivering a heavy load, throwing his *clitellas* or pack-saddles down in a surly, coarse manner: this is precisely what his courtly messenger must avoid (though his father's nickname is *Asinus*), and if he finds the task burdensome he should toss his book away rather than create such an ugly scene. These are exactly the words that Milton turns into playful advice for Oldenburg. In his prose controversy, however, he had used this Horatian image of the drudging pack-animal with more vehemence and contempt, to dismiss the efforts of his pedantic, undereducated opponents.⁴¹

Marvell will pick up precisely this image towards the end of his poem "On Paradise Lost," where he enters the controversy over blank verse versus rhyme. (It is possible that the suave, mock-modest Horatian epistle about conveying his precious works to the emperor had been woven into Milton's earlier correspondence with Marvell, or that Milton had shared with him a copy of the letter to Oldenburg in Saumur.) Augmenting his own witticism about the fashionable tags and "Bushy-points" that reduce the heroic couplet to tailor's work, Marvell also calls the rhyming Dryden a "Pack-Horse" who needs bells on his harness to keep plodding on (as Nigel Smith notes in his edition).⁴² I propose that this Saumur correspondence acted as the middle term, the medium through which that pack-horse image travelled from Milton's heavy prose to Marvell's poem, gaining in transmission an aura of Augustan wit and sophisticated satire. The "jingling" of the Poet Laureate's couplets echoes, not only Milton's sneer at "tinkling" rhyme in the prefatory note to his epic, but his long-felt hatred of "glib" and "ear-pleasing" enemies.⁴³

1674: Marvell ruins the sacred truths

The much-studied commendatory poem for the revised 1674 edition of *Paradise Lost* continues and amplifies the 1650s correspondence. Readers of this journal will know that Marvell's encomium unfolds according to a sequence that he learnt from Ben

⁴⁰ Giuseppe Cugnoni, *Agostino Chigi Il Magnifico* (Rome: Società Romana di Storia Patria, 1878), 24.

⁴¹ Milton, *The Reason of Church Government*, in *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 1, ed. Don M. Wolfe (New York: Yale University Press, and London: Geoffrey Cumberlege/Oxford University Press, 1953), 822: "when [episcopal polemicists] have like good sumpters laid ye down their hors load of citations and fathers at your dore, ... ye may take off their pack-saddles, their days work is don." The connection to Horace *Ep.* 1.19 is not noted in this edition.

⁴² Marvell, *Poems*, ed. Smith, 184 (note to line 48).

⁴³ Marvell, "On Paradise Lost," 46-8; Milton, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, in *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 2, 222, *epistola* 24, and "The Verse," prefaced to the 1674 twelve-book *PL*.

Jonson, not Milton: initial doubts and fears give way to praise that thereby sounds more convincing.⁴⁴ This strategy also reenacts the “turning and rising” of Trajan’s column, the model of serious writing in Marvell’s 1654 letter, and it reflects his pedagogical expertise too: as Marvell pivots from critique to eulogy he becomes “less severe” (11)—echoing the “*Discipline severe*” under which Maria Fairfax grew to perfection (*Upon Appleton House*, 723). Furthermore, arguing at cross purposes to strengthen the case is an extension of Cromwellian architecture, “fastening” the whole project by incorporating what seems at first to “thwart” it. Marvell complicates the Jonsonian scheme in ways that allude to his private literary relationship with Milton.

“On Paradise Lost” operates as a public document and as an esoteric communication with the radical Milton of the Interregnum, drawn from Marvell’s attentive memory of what passed between them. The younger poet confirms his *familiaris* status by demonstrating familiarity (in the modern sense) with Milton’s writings both published and private. Even the signature is at once open and clandestine: “A. M.” could signify a number of different names or the Oxbridge abbreviation for any graduate *Artis Magister*. It may be a stretch to say that Marvell wrote a 54-line poem as a secret signal to Milton recalling their bonding-session in 1654, but the opening couplet surely evokes the image of Trajan’s Column again:

When I beheld the Poet blind, yet bold,
In slender Book his vast Design unfold ... (1–2)

The poet and his poem are “beheld” as a single object, a single visual experience condensing actual visits to the blind bard at work. Referring to the substantial printed epic as “slender” has puzzled some readers, one of whom speculates that Marvell intended to belittle it as a mere “polemical pamphlet.”⁴⁵ But this resolves into another creative yet precise scale-paradox if the monumental column is kept in the mind’s eye: this “Design” is likewise both “vast” and “slender.” And though “unfold” is used in *Hamlet* for “a tale,” it triggers a more specific image here: the scrolls unfurling around and up that monument.

Other effects are also packed into that opening couplet. The dense alliteration *beheld/blind/bold*—as if a single knot of consonants had engendered all three

⁴⁴ See Andrew Shifflett, “‘By Lucan Driv’n About’: A Jonsonian Marvell’s Lucanic Milton,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (1996): 803–21. Other discussions of Marvell’s commendatory poem include G. F. Parker, “Marvell on Milton: Why the Poem Rhymes Not,” *Cambridge Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (1991): 183–209; Rogers, “Ruin the Sacred Truths,” 680–6; Augustine, *Life*, 210–13; and Augustine, “Marvell, Punctuation, and the Play of Voice,” in *The Cambridge History of Punctuation in English Literature*, ed. John Lennard, Jeffrey Gutierrez, Mark Faulkner, and Elizabeth M. Bonapfel, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, in press), draft graciously supplied by the author, 9–12.

⁴⁵ Augustine, “Punctuation,” 10.

words—anticipates the dichotomy *perplex/explain* in line 15, a consonant-cluster where opposites are connected by almost-anagrammatic similarity. Smith's edition recognizes that "When I beheld" in line 1 echoes the sonnet-opening formula "When I consider," which Milton had already borrowed from Shakespeare and which Marvell's 1654 letter uses to introduce precisely this Trajan's Column simile ("When I consider how equally it turnes and rises ..."), further evidence for his access to Milton's manuscripts since it quotes an intimate, private sonnet published only in 1673. But Smith does not cite a more immediate and public source, an episode in *Paradise Lost* that had already continued this sequence of cross-author echoes: Adam's speech to Raphael about the awesome immensity of the cosmos ("When I behold this goodly Frame, this World ...").⁴⁶ Marvell thus aligns his first astonishment with the perceptions of a freshly-created but inexperienced Adam, and insinuates from the start the idea that becomes explicit in the final couplet, that Milton's epic is a cosmos in its own right, likewise fashioned by a mighty Creator.

Some commentators believe that Marvell expresses real fear and reinforces it by using words that Milton applies exclusively to the Satanic side. The reality is more complex and more interesting, however. *Spite* is certainly negative, the "vulgar" passion eschewed by Charles I in Marvell's "Horatian Ode," applied to Cromwell's enemies in his *First Anniversary* and to mutinous sailors in his *Last Instructions*, then hurled against Satan in *Paradise Lost* Book 2, pre-echoing Satan's own speech of defiance in Book 9.⁴⁷ Revisionists hoping to uncover Marvell's true dislike and "hostility" also claim the words *vast*, *bold* and *design* as "usually" or "always" infernal in Milton.⁴⁸ But this is only true in the first books, where Beelzebub and Satan reveal their plan

to confound the race
Of mankind in one root, and Earth with Hell
To mingle and involve, done all to *spite*
The great Creatour? But their *spite* still serves
His glory to augment. The *bold design*
Pleas'd highly those infernal States, and joy
Sparkl'd in all their eyes. (PL 2.382–8, my emphases)

⁴⁶ PL 8.15; most scholars who register the "when I consider" echo mistakenly assume that Milton's sonnet refers to his blindness.

⁴⁷ Marvell, "Horatian Ode," 61, *First Anniversary*, 32, 323, 295, *Last Instructions*, 602 (and compare 825 on recalcitrant MPs); Milton, PL 2.384–5, 9.147, 176–8, 10.1, 1044 (where even *spite* recurs in a milder form, the fallen Adam dissuading Eve from suicide and celibacy because they would express "despite" against God).

⁴⁸ Marvell, *Poems*, ed. Smith, 182 and note to line 2: "describing Milton through Milton's words for Satan ... *vast* usually associated with Satan ... *design* always used in a negative sense in *Paradise Lost*." Augustine, "Punctuation," 10, interestingly cites Roger L'Estrange's denunciation of Milton's "Bold *Design*" in *Eikonoklastes*, and claims that Marvell is likewise "presenting Milton as an enemy" in these opening lines.

But Marvell the structural reader has been astute enough to notice how such loaded words recur with a more celestial aura, shedding their pejorative connotation as the narrative “unfolds” upward from Hell. Satan is certainly “bold,” but so are the “Champions” of knightly epic, the unfallen Adam conversing with the Creator, the good angels Zephon and Abdiel, and above all Milton himself, when he revisits the realm of light “with bolder wing.” “Vast” does apply many times to Satan or the space through which he moves, but more often to the cosmos without negative implication, starting with the fertilizing Spirit that “Dove-like sat brooding on the vast Abyss” with his or her “mighty wings outspread” as boldly as the poet’s own. We have already seen how in Book 7 the Son marks out our universe in “the vast profunditie obscure” using compasses, perhaps modeling himself on the Protector.⁴⁹ Marvell reconstructs “in Miniature” this progression of the word *vast* from Satanic to divine; in line 2 it is impressive but troubling, but by line 42 it denotes the splendid immensity of Milton’s thought:

Where couldst thou Words of such a compass find?
Whence furnish such a vast expence of Mind? (41–42)

Within “compass” (extent) lurks a sly Marvellian allusion to the compasses that defined Milton’s macrocosm and associated vastness with creativity.

“Design” is a particularly rich example of this “positional” semantics, whereby words change register as they migrate or metamorphose over the course of a text. It does indeed apply frequently to Satan, and Kenneth Gross adds that suspicion of a “great design” had also appeared in the very first stanza of Marvell’s own *Upon Appleton House*: Fairfax’s “sober” and modest manor-house is “Work of no Forrain Architect ... Who of his great Design in pain / Did for a Model vault his Brain” (2, 5–6).⁵⁰ Recalling that line might well cast Milton as an overblown narcissist or “foreign Architect” — but the august image of Trajan’s Column intervenes to redeem that “design,” to play down the “pain” and hubris. Within *Paradise Lost* itself, the negative associations of *design* are gradually purged off: first it denotes innocent plans for the next day’s gardening, and then refers directly to redemption, with the revelation that the Son was “design’d” to be man’s friend and mediator. Marvell, who used “Designs” twice in the *First Anniversary* for the “great” exploits achieved by Cromwell and his navy with divine

⁴⁹ PL 1.20–1, 763, 3.13, 4.854, 5.876, 6.109, 7.225–9, 8.434. For other positive uses of *vast*, see PL 2.711, 4.777, 5.267, 7.472, 8.24. See also the approving phrase “vast minds” in John Hall’s translation of Lucretius *On the Sublime*, *Περὶ ὤψους*, or *Dionysius Longinus of the Height of Eloquence, Rendred out of the Originall* (London, 1652), f. B4v.

⁵⁰ Gross, “Pardon Me,” 80.

help, does not literally repeat the keyword in his *Paradise Lost* poem, but he chooses it to signal his awareness of its Janus-faced usage in Milton, looking back to ominous associations but forward to accomplished glory.⁵¹

We saw that Marvell's ability to encapsulate an entire book served him well as a literary ambassador to Bradshaw and the French Protestants, but later gave him a reputation as a sort of cluster-bomb with many subversive Miltons inside him. Now he displays this skill to spectacular effect, as if to defy the adversary who accused him of containing Milton's worst writings "in Miniature." Samuel Barrow, the only other author of a prefatory poem in this edition of *Paradise Lost*, focuses almost entirely on its contents; he starts by praising Milton's depiction of the universe, in grandiose language that suggests an affinity with Lucretius, but devotes most of his poem to the War in Heaven, assimilating Milton to Homer and Virgil. Marvell, in contrast, singles out no particular theme or episode, and summarizes the whole contents of the epic in just fifteen words, compressed into three lines and ending at a caesura:

Messiah Crown'd, Gods Reconcil'd Decree,
Rebelling Angels, the Forbidden Tree,
Heav'n, Hell, Earth, Chaos, All. (3–5)

He signals his attentiveness to Milton's "design" by listing these episodes in their chronological order rather than by when they appear in the narrative—except that Chaos disconcertingly moves towards the climactic position, a reminder that it still surrounds our finite universe.⁵² This "cursory Review and sudden Account" displays, not only Marvell's skill in compression or "shorthand," but his critical ability to determine what is essential in a text; as he did in that 1654 letter on the *Second Defense*, he vaults over the subject-matter and instead concentrates on the literary effect of *Paradise Lost*, the almost-overwhelming emotional and aesthetic impact that generates first apprehension and then enthusiastic praise. That is what he will finally label "sublime."

⁵¹ Milton, *PL* 5.33, 10.60; Marvell, *First Anniversary*, 110, 354, and compare 158 ("good Designes") and 242 (fools who think the "high Decrees" of God are "by Man design'd").

⁵² I assume that Marvell follows Milton's most frequent use of "Decree" for the initial command to worship the newly-promoted Son, though Gross and Smith claim that it refers exclusively to the promise of salvation at *PL* 11.47 and thus breaks the chronological order. This interpretation depends on the word "reconcil'd," which the Son has used when pleading with the Father to end his "wrath" at 11.39, but the Father's reply is inconclusive, since immediately after the promise he decrees the expulsion from Paradise in a speech full of wrath and scorn. Augustine (*Life*, 211–12) attempting to prove that Marvell's "virtuosic" compression is deriding Milton, argues that the monosyllabic contraction "Heav'n" is deliberately "clip[ped]." However, this is standard seventeenth-century usage and appears over 500 times in *Paradise Lost*.

Marvell's strongest expression of fear is hedged with ambiguity, of several types:

the Argument

Held me a while misdoubting his Intent,
That he would ruine (for I saw him strong)
The sacred Truths to Fable and old Song,
(So Sampson groap'd the Temples Posts in spight)
The World o' rewhelming to revenge his Sight. (5–10)

“Argument” means mere plot-summary—as printed at the head of each book in the 1674 *Paradise Lost*—but also the fiercely argumentative “bold[ness]” shared by both Milton and Lucretius, the prime example of the “strong” but dangerous poet who had already done what Marvell fears Milton might do. “Held” echoes the opening “beheld,” reinforcing the implication of stasis and contracted time with added passivity. Marvell doesn’t just doubt, he “misdoubts”—a verb that fascinated Harold Bloom.⁵³ Just as later Marvell endorses Milton’s polemic against rhyme *in rhyming couplets*, so here he doubts and affirms at once. His typical cultivated ambivalence, *in utrumque paratus* or occupying both sides of a debate at once, is here captured in the single word “misdoubting,” suspending dichotomy like a fly in amber. The famous phrase “ruin the sacred truths,” which provided a title and a paradigm for Bloom, juggles different registers and grammatical forms. Abject in meaning, *ruin* nonetheless has an epic feel: *ruina*, meaning a disastrous physical fall, is a favorite word of Lucretius and Milton, who uses this noun to dramatic effect in the Latin *Naturam non pati senium* and Englishes it in the vehement prose and the explosive opening of *Paradise Lost* (“thunder with ruin upon the heads of evil counsellors, ... hideous ruine and combustion down / To bottomless perdition” [PL 1.46–7]).⁵⁴ The verb is much less frequent in Milton, and the intransitive form occurs only once, at a striking moment when the goddess Hell looks up in fright to see Satan and his army “ruining from Heav’n” (6.868). Marvell’s active verb “ruine” is thus fraught with possibilities. Deliberately intruding the long parenthesis “(for I saw him strong)” makes *ruin* seem intransitive at first, a kind of internal collapse. Once the couplet resumes after this heavy break “the sacred truths” appear as the

⁵³ Bloom, *Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 125.

⁵⁴ See Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*. trans. W.H.D. Rouse, rev. Martin F. Smith. Loeb Classical Library 181 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), 1.740, 1107, 2.1145, 3.584, 5.347, 6.156, 544, 592, 600, 607, 801 (and compare the verb *ruere*, 4.403, 518, 5.96, 307, 313, 368, 1325, 6.264); Milton, *Naturam non pati senium*, 20, 26; *Reason of Church-Government*, in *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 1, 859.

transitive object—but the grammar is still not resolved, for the phrase then mutates into the peculiar Miltonic coinage *ruin to*.⁵⁵

The simple binary opposition of sacred truth and “Fable and old Song” rapidly dissolves, as Marvell proceeds to ruin one truth particularly sacred in the Renaissance and seventeenth century but not shared by Milton—the typological notion that Samson was an exemplary hero prefiguring Christian virtues. The independent-minded Marvell infers his destructive “spight” from Judges 16:28–30—and fears that Milton was driven by the same impulse “to revenge his sight” (the rhyme adroitly reinforcing the conceptual and psychological connection). Strictly speaking this ignoble passion is given only to Samson, sealed off with a parenthesis in line 9, groping two columns plainer than Trajan’s but still scaled up to those of a “Temple” rather than the mere “house” of the Geneva and King James translations.⁵⁶ Whether or not it applies to Milton and his desire to demolish the whole “World” rather than one building, Marvell is surely endorsing the bold revision of Scripture he pretends to fear. Among the many echoes gathered by Haan, one is particularly uncanny: the “forward youth” prominent at the start of the “Horatian Ode” matches the same phrase in Milton’s unpublished draft letter to a friend.⁵⁷ Marvell could thus have enjoyed privy access to the tragedy drafts in his friend’s Trinity Manuscript, where Samson is clearly labelled *Hubristes*. He certainly registered the problem caused by Samson’s explicit demand to be “avenged” and his explicitly suicidal “let me die,” requiring much effort to exonerate him in *Samson Agonistes*. Marvell again bonds with his author, by evoking their shared understanding of Samson as a contradictory, conflicted figure more suitable for a Greek *agon* than a Christian panegyric.

Syntactic ambiguity also resonates in the following paragraph, where Marvell grows “less severe” but still “the success did fear”; as Stephen Fallon puts it, “Marvell fears both that Milton would not successfully embody his project and that he would.”⁵⁸ Fallon links Milton’s fear of falling and wandering like the lost Bellerophon, in the invocation to *Paradise Lost* Book 7 (16–20), to Marvell’s concern

⁵⁵ The prepositional verb “ruin to” is not recorded in *OED* but is used once in Milton’s *Of Reformation* (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 1, 582–3). Augustine comments fully on the disruptive parentheses or *lunulae* in lines 7 and 9, which “subtly dramatise inwardness of perception, the subjective experience of misdoubt” (“Punctuation,” 11–12), but assumes that Marvell “align[s] with royalist hostility to Milton in mocking his blindness” because he could not see the printed page. However, Alistair Fowler infers from the manuscript of *PL* Book 1 that “punctuation and spelling may have been revised under Milton’s directions” and he surely trained his amanuenses to indicate orthographic marks when needed. See Alistair Fowler and John Carey, eds. *The Poems of John Milton* (London and Harlow: Longman, 1968), 423.

⁵⁶ As noted in Gross, “Pardon Me,” 84.

⁵⁷ Haan, ed., *Epistolarum*, 458. As with all echoes, one must check whether they are coincidental results of each author drawing from a common stock, but in this case the phrase was not common.

⁵⁸ Fallon, “Intention and Its Limits in *Paradise Lost*: The Case of Bellerophon,” in *Literary Milton: Text, Pretext, Context*, ed. Diana Benet and Michael Lieb (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1994), 177–9.

Through that wide Field how he his way should find,
O're which lame Faith leads Understanding blind. (13–14)

I would add that the run of eighteen monosyllables starting with “did fear,” around the single polysyllable “Understanding,” mimics the faltering and groping in a kind of conceptual onomatopoeia. And I would argue that the first round of positive assessment—

Thou hast not miss'd one thought that could be fit,
And all that was improper dost omit (27–28)

—enacts a similar flatness and lameness, as if to set up a weak, moralistic, content-fixated critical model before sweeping on to the real achievement of this “Mighty Poet, ... That Majesty which through thy Work doth Reign” (24, 31).

Along the way Marvell voices yet another concern: “Jealous I was that some less skilful hand” (18) might scupper the whole project by reducing it to a play, as he knew the “Pack-Horse” Dryden was planning to do. Growing gradually more zealous in Milton’s behalf, he takes on and mirrors the “Jealousies” that Milton half-admitted in his recommendation-letter. At the same time, Marvell also confirms the proficiency in Greek that Milton had praised there. That “less skilful hand” botching a noble project recalls the *amathei cheiri* or uneducated hand of the engraver William Marshall, who ruined Milton’s likeness in the frontispiece of the 1645 *Poems*. The same hand—ignorant, illiterate, lacking all the mental qualities associated with *math*—was forced to engrave this mockery of himself in a Greek epigram that he could not understand.⁵⁹ Milton never translated or explained these lines, which remained accessible only for the educated elite to which Marvell is proud to belong.

Delight, horror and sublimity

I suggested earlier that Marvell wove a web of covert intertextual allusions for Milton’s ear only. In the 1654 letter the significant intertexts included Marvell’s own *Upon Appleton House* and *First Anniversary*, but in his *Paradise Lost* poem he adds Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura*, an epic guardedly praised for its poetry but feared for its “impiety” and “atheism.” Marvell surely knew of Milton’s private devotion to that poet (which I discuss in a *Milton Studies* essay).⁶⁰ Appropriately, the crucial turning-and-rising

⁵⁹ Milton, “In Effigiei Ejus Sculptorem,” 1. See also Tomos Evans, “Marshall’s Ignorant Hand: the 1645 *Poems* Frontispiece and the Title Page of Gerard Langbaine’s First Edition of Longinus (1636),” *Milton Quarterly* 58 (forthcoming, draft kindly shared by the author). John Carey, in his second edition of Milton’s *Complete Shorter Poems* (Harlow: Longman, 1997), 289, notes with dry satisfaction that Milton himself committed the error of “false quantity” in this epigram.

⁶⁰ Turner, “Milton, Lucretius and the ‘Womb of Nature,’” *Milton Studies* 66 (2024), 1–41, with quotations from Lucy Hutchinson about the impious Roman poet (2).

moment in Marvell's poem, when his initial "misdoubts" and fears dissolve into eulogy, comes straight from Lucretius: the ancient poet, awestruck by the revelations of his philosophical mentor Epicurus, is "seized by *divina voluptas* and *horror*."⁶¹ Marvell, yielding to the contradictory "gravity and ease" of Milton's epic poetry and speaking for his contemporaries in the first-person plural, exclaims that "at once delight and horror on us seise" (35). Here again the progression from apprehension to appreciation is not simple or monodic, for as he overcomes his initial fear Marvell experiences and articulates a complex synthesis of feelings that would conventionally be opposed, anticipating the "terror without danger" at the core of Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*. Placing the keyword "sublime" at the crowning point of the penultimate line is therefore quite prophetic.

The negative and positive reactions to *Paradise Lost* are both related to Lucretius, then: first Marvell fears that Milton might "ruin the sacred truths" like that notoriously "impious" predecessor; as he surrenders to the contradictory but compelling strength-and-softness of the poetry itself, he translates directly from Lucretius's *voluptas et horror* tribute. Yet he also introduces a new competitiveness or "aemulation." The transitional couplet—

At once delight and horreur on us seise,
Thou singst with so much gravity and ease (35–36)

—echoes not only *De Rerum Natura* but the climactic moment of his own *Upon Appleton House*, where Maria Fairfax walks at sunset and "an horror calm and dumb" (671) settles over the whole landscape—a pleasurable frisson rather than a shudder. Marvell absolves the negative word *horror* by leading it back to its more innocent Latin etymon, and thereby provides a model for the older Milton's "imparadising" of words that in their modern English usage were ominously fallen—*wanton*, *error*, *mazy*, etc. But *horror* never received this ameliorating treatment in Milton: the root appears forty-seven times in his epic, but it is always intensely negative. So Marvell signals his advance beyond Milton's aesthetic, as a pioneer in the transvaluation of pleasing horror familiar in the eighteenth century, when James Thomson turns Satan's "Hail horrors, hail / Infernal world" into "Welcome kindred Glooms! / Wish'd, wint'ry, Horrors, hail!"⁶²

⁶¹ Lucretius *De Rerum Natura* 3.28–30. This echo has been rediscovered by scholars several times since the eighteenth-century edition cited in Smith ed., *Poems*, 183.

⁶² This line translates his own "Hortus" line 19 ("Horroresque trahunt muti") and will be echoed in the climactic scene of *Last Instructions*, 889; Milton, *PL* 1.249–50; Thomson, *Winter* (London, 1725), 5–6. For the "structural importance" of "calm horror" in both of Marvell's long poems see Turner, *Politics of Landscape*, 65.

Reading the epic had already been conceived in spatial and topographical terms, as a journey through a threatening or welcoming landscape, and in the case of Lucretius *horror* had already come into the picture. John Evelyn, for example, compares *De Rerum Natura* to a

curious *Landskip*, or delicious prospect where sometimes from the cragginess of inaccessible Rocks, uneven and horrid precipices (such as are found, respecting those admirable plains of *Lombardy*) there breaks and divides (as the Wandering Traveller approaches) a passage to his eyes down into some goodly and luxurious valley; where [all things] conspire to create a new *Paradise*, and recompense him the pains of so many difficult accesses.⁶³

Evelyn was doubly expert here: this remark prefaces his own translation of Book 1, the first English version of Lucretius to be published, and he was already a notable traveler and connoisseur of art. But while the “horrid precipices” are an integral part of the overall prospect, on an emotional or subjective level they serve only as “pain” to enhance by contrast the pleasure of seeing a gentle, paradisaal valley. Marvell had already played variations on this conception of landscape: the mild, low-lying grounds of Appleton House, “*Paradice’s only Map*” (768) are explicitly contrasted to the grim world of “*Precipices*” (764), but in the climactic entry of Maria the emotion of “horror” is detached from the frightening rocky wilderness and definitively entered into the category of awesome pleasure.

Marvell did not invent this upward revaluation of *horror*, as I discovered some fifty years ago. Topographical poets discovered “pleasing horreur” in imaginary places or grotesque rock-formations, and similar phrases were deployed to commend tragedy:

Thy lines runne smooth, and lofty, and expresse
At once their terrour, and their pleasantnesse.⁶⁴

But Marvell is the among the first to apply this trope to a real, prestigious landscape—Appleton at sunset graced by the heiress Maria Fairfax—and the first (as far as I know,

⁶³ Evelyn, *An Essay on the First Book of T. Lucretius Carus De Rerum Natura* (London, 1656), f. A6-v. For the context of this passage see Turner, *Politics of Landscape*, 21.

⁶⁴ Robert Stapylton, commendatory poem in Samuel Harding, *Sicily and Naples* (London, 1640), f. A1. Compare John Denham, *Cooper’s Hill* (1655 version) lines 209–12: along the Thames near Windsor “the steep horrid roughness of the Wood / Strives with the gentle calmness of the flood. / Such huge extreams when Nature doth unite, / Wonder from thence results, from thence delight”; Richard Fanshawe, *The Escuriall*, in *Il Pastor Fido* (London, 1647), 238–9: “pleasing honour” an erratum for *horror* where Fanshawe’s own Latin version reads “placidissimus horror.”

though readers of *Marvell Studies* could correct me) to link Lucretius's *voluptas/horror* to Milton and confirm it with the word *sublime*, provocatively placed at the crowning point of his penultimate line.

Full-blown sublimity theory flourished in England well before Nicolas Boileau published his French translation of Longinus (in 1674, therefore topical as Marvell wrote). Gerard Langbaine produced his bilingual Greek-Latin edition in 1636, with an allegorical title page engraving where William Marshall first demonstrated his ignorance of Greek.⁶⁵ John Hall, a friend of both Milton and Marvell, brought out his English translation in 1652, *Of the Height of Eloquence*; Marvell alludes to this title, as well as to Milton's praise of Cromwell "descending by so many steps *ex sublimi*," when he calls the *Second Defense* a "scale" or stair that leads up to the "Height of the Roman eloquence." Milton himself uses the English *sublime* and *sublimed* quite frequently, to denote lofty thought, an exultant mood, or drunken bravado; in *Paradise Lost* this word also describes physical elevation in flight, chemical sublimation, the solemn appearance of the Archangel Michael, and uplifted eyes.⁶⁶ Milton's usage is thus very broad and somewhat old-fashioned, rarely if ever directly linked to aesthetics or Longinus's sublime. Marvell may once again be quietly promoting his own expertise over that of his senior ex-colleague.

The Longinian Sublime involves not merely grandiloquent diction or magnificent subject matter but an ineffable aesthetic experience, immanent in verbal expression yet beyond it. "Majesty" or "state" (as Marvell puts it in line 33), astonishing scale ("Where couldst thou Words of such a compass find?" [41]) and cognitive exertion ("Whence furnish such a vast expence of Mind?" [42]) are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the sublime sensation of being stretched beyond limit—or "seized" in Marvell's term (35). (It is tempting to make Marvell's Milton a forerunner of Kant as well as Burke.) Only one moment in *Paradise Lost* approaches this emotive and transcendent reception-based sublimity, when Adam describes his collapse after arguing with the Creator:

streind to the highth
In that celestial Colloquie sublime,
As with an object that excels the sense,
Dazl'd and spent, [I] sunk down. (8.454–7)

⁶⁵ Discussed in Evans, "Marshall's Ignorant Hand," *passim*.

⁶⁶ Milton, *Defensio Secunda*, 225, PL 1.235, 2.528, 3.72, 4.300, 6.771, 7.421, 10.536, 1014, 11.236, *Samson Agonistes* line 1669 (used like modern "high"). When the Archangel Raphael explains how food is "by gradual scale sublim'd" (PL 5.483) he may be recalling the "Scale" metaphor in Marvell's letter, as well as the ascending "steps" of Platonic Eros, which he also calls a "scale" (8.591).

Both poets might have recalled John Hall's introduction to Longinus, chief among "regular and vast minds." Hall's title reduced sublimity to "the height of eloquence," but his preface emphasizes, not mere loftiness or grandiloquence, but its power of "prevailing over" the reader and pressing beyond language and consciousness. Hall insists that the sublime "must therefore have somewhat I cannot tell how divine in it ... somewhat which I cannot expresse ... somewhat *Ethereall*, somewhat above man."⁶⁷

What then generates this sublimity-effect? As we have seen, it requires the synesthetic fusion of affects conventionally separate and opposed, a diachronic compression of the negative-to-positive semantic shifts that "unfold" throughout the epic and its prefatory poem—gravity and ease combined, delight and horror "*at once*." Gross observes that Marvell's chiasmic couplet "surprisingly" links delight to gravity and horror to ease, so that "painful and gentle feelings ... transform each other"; I would add that these dyads coalesce rather than pairing off neatly.⁶⁸ And as the verse continues *singing* and *soaring* also combine, an acoustic and kinetic event at once – inspired perhaps by Milton's account of music in *Paradise Lost*, in Heaven always integrated with dance, and even on Earth conveyed by motion, as when Jubal-Cain's

volant touch

Instinct through all proportions low and high
Fled and pursu'd transverse the resonant fugue. (11.561–3)

Marvell again melds two different tropes used by epic poets to announce their ambition, just as Milton combines them in his first invocation:

Sing Heav'nly Muse,
... I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous *Song*,
That with no middle flight intends to *soar*
Above th'Aonian Mount. (*PL* 1.6, 12–15, my emphases)

In Milton's prose the poet "*soaring* in the high region of his fancies with his garland and *singing* robes about him" remains hypothetical, waiting in his dressing room for his call in some future resurgence of public literature.⁶⁹ Marvell now confirms that he has

⁶⁷ Hall, *Περὶ ὠψύου*, ff. B1v-4v (prefatory epistle to Bulstrode Whitlocke). Achinstein ("Milton's Spectre," 16, 25) associates "sublime" with transcendent moments that seem to go beyond the conventional reference to elevated diction or contents; Marvell does not of course *repudiate* the idea of sublime subject-matter, but he *reduces* it to a brief comparand in line 53 ("Thy verse created like thy Theme sublime").

⁶⁸ Gross, "Pardon Me," 90.

⁶⁹ *Reason of Church Government*, 826 (my emphasis). Rogers believes that Marvell parodies this passage directly, in the wood-sequence of *Upon Appleton House*. See "Ruin the Sacred Truths," 685.

answered that call and achieved his goal. Qualities ascribed to singing attach themselves to soaring and thereby generate intriguing new combinations: soaring would certainly suggest “ease,” but it would puzzle Newton to explain how anything could soar *with* rather than against “gravity.”

The idea of creative flight (“with mighty wings outspread” [1.20]; “with bolder wing” [3.13]) then brings on the synthesis of not two but three qualities normally incompatible. Milton

above humane flight dost soar aloft,
With Plume so strong, so equal, and so soft. (37–8)

His “Plume”—his pen and his wing-feather—is at once *strong*, *equal*, and *soft*. Combining all three propels the poet above the human, or as Hall defined it “somewhat above man.”⁷⁰ Versions of the strength/softness dyad were already widespread in landscape poetry, including Marvell’s own eulogy of Bilbrough Hill, which like Fairfax himself displays commanding “greatness” and even “terror” while remaining “soft” in its gentle ascent.⁷¹ But Marvell now complicates it by adding the loaded word “equal,” which still generates controversy when Milton declares Adam and Eve “not equal”: is this fallen masculinism, or a paradisaal difference-without-hierarchy? Marvell toyed with the embattled political meaning in *Upon Appleton House*, where “Levellers take Pattern at” the “naked equal Flat” of the meadow after mowing.⁷² But his praise of Milton’s *Second Defense* in the 1654 letter gives the word an entirely positive sense (“how *equally* it turnes and rises with so many figures”), entirely removed from levelling or flatness (*Letters*, 306). And in *The First Anniversary* the “most Equal” politicians become the stable pillars that sustain the state building (93). *Equal* connotes consistency, integrity, dignity and sustainable strength—qualities already evoked in Marvell’s poem when Amphion creates “Columns high” by switching to “*graver* Notes” on his instrument (63–4, my emphasis). The associative cluster of rising, gravity, and equality anticipates Marvell’s own literary ambition—to try “*graver* Accents” in serious political poetry (121)—and finally recurs to define the sublimity of *Paradise Lost*.⁷³ This is now achieved

⁷⁰ Hall, *Περί ὠψους*, f. B4.

⁷¹ “Upon the Hill and Grove at Bill-borow,” 17, 26, 38. Compare Joseph Beaumont, *Psyche* (London, 1648), 306: Mount Carmel “strong in high-grown Woods ... sweet / In fragrant Pastures”; William Chamberlayne, *Pharonnida: a Heroick Poem* (London, 1659), first pagination, 6: “In the composure of this happy place ... strength and beauty sate / Combin’d in one.”

⁷² *Upon Appleton House*, 449–50 (the word *equal* occurs five other times in that poem, e.g. for the proportionate dwelling [12] or the symmetrical allée in the wood [621], each time provoking puzzled notes in the Oxford edition).

⁷³ Compare *First Anniversary*, 390 (Cromwell “At Home a Subject on the equal Floor” of Parliament); in “Bill-borow” the “equal” (i.e. geometrically regular) curvature of the hill is compared to both the “stiffest Compass” and the “softest” painted eyebrow.

within poetry itself, rather than in the public sphere of Cromwell's Protectorate or in the larger cosmos. But this hardly means that sublimity is confined or "subdued and domesticated" as Gross concludes.⁷⁴ By becoming "sublime" the verbal and physical cosmos achieve equal resonance.

Critics trying to digest the entire poem often find it jarring when snide remarks about the rhyme-controversy are interleaved with sublime moments like these. Nevertheless, this final paragraph continues and culminates the larger project defined in this essay, what Fallon called the "witty and intimate" dialog with Milton, and I call the "web" of textual allusions, covert as well as public – echoes of *Paradise Lost* only perceptible after long and careful reading, invocations of writings from the Cromwellian period supposedly blotted from the national consciousness.⁷⁵ The quip about rhyme as "tag[ging]" points goes back to Marvell's own *Rehearsal Transpros'd* but gains extra relish if the reader recalls Dryden's visit and Milton's half-civil, half-contemptuous permission to "tag my verses."⁷⁶ "Tinkling Rhime" (46) chimes with Milton's scorn for "the jingling sound of like endings," but now resonates within the larger metaphor of Dryden as a mere pack-horse, derived from Milton's now-notorious revolutionary prose and transmitted (as I proposed earlier) via the 1650s correspondence; this figure of fun had already appeared in the paragraph about the "less skilful hand" (18) who might reduce Milton's "Creation" to a mere stage-play, a covert allusion or in-joke since Dryden's *State of Innocence* never ran in the theatre and was not published until three years later. These lines also encapsulate a characteristic doubleness or obliquity in Marvell, which expresses "aemulation" in both senses, admiration but also critical competition. The lines on the "ill imitating" but ambitious playwright, a phrase borrowed from *Paradise Regain'd*, themselves reduce Milton's epic by summarizing it as "the whole Creations day," as if it were already a play constrained by Aristotle's unity of time.⁷⁷ This may be another instance where Marvell shows an acquaintance with the Trinity Manuscript, where he could have seen the abortive outlines for "Paradise Lost" dramas.

Most obviously, Marvell engages here with Milton's prose polemic against rhyme, which appeared immediately after his poem on the right hand of the opening. Here too he pursues transverse the resonant fugue of disparate ideas and affiliations. Marvell agrees with Milton's argument, denies it by using couplets, then draws attention to

⁷⁴ Gross, "Pardon Me," 88, 90.

⁷⁵ Fallon, "Invention," 178.

⁷⁶ John Aubrey's account of this meeting of Milton and Dryden is frequently cited, for example Smith, ed., *Poems of Marvell*, 181.

⁷⁷ Gross ("Pardon Me," 86–7) notes the echo of *Paradise Regain'd*, where Jesus says the Graeco-Roman classics are just Hebrew literature "ill imitated."

this modish offence, managing to be simultaneously transgressive and conformist. He does not merely “allude with gentle irony” to Milton’s prose manifesto for blank verse, as Alistair Fowler put it in his first edition of *Paradise Lost*, but follows it closely. Famous as a polemic transproser, Marvell *transverses* Milton’s prose nearly word for word. Rhyme is “no necessary Adjunct or true Ornament of Poem or good Verse,” and it is intrinsically “barbarous” because of its medieval origins, yet it has been

grac’t indeed since by the use of some famous modern Poets, carried away by Custom, but much to their own vexation, hindrance, and constraint to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse than else they would have exprest them.⁷⁸

Well mightst thou scorn thy Readers to allure
With tinkling Rhime, of thy own Sense secure; ...
I too transported by the Mode offend,
And while I meant to Praise thee, must Commend. (45–6, 51–2)

“Carried away by Custom” becomes “transported by the Mode,” and the vexing “constraint” of having to adopt a “worse” word is demonstrated in the actual writing, where Marvell deftly adopts the role of one “forced by the constraints of rhyme” to conclude with the lukewarm *Commend* rather than full-throated *Praise*—another instance of the “conceptual onomatopoeia” that I found earlier in passages on lameness and fitness or propriety.⁷⁹ (Later reprints of Marvell’s poem, which have been digitally captured and now dominate the Internet, actually emend the punch-line “must commend” to “mis-commend,” creating an unintended parallel with *misdoubt*.)⁸⁰ Even here, however, Marvell augments the point as well as proving it by example. Confessing in the previous line that “we for fashion wear” the tags of rhyme, he places himself in the literary beau monde, the “famous modern Poets” among whom Milton did not belong. The sensuous “allure” of rhyme is never mentioned in “The Verse,” but Marvell adds it perhaps to recall how deeply Milton resented the popularity of his enemy Alexander

⁷⁸ Milton, “The Verse.”

⁷⁹ Augustine, *Life*, 213: “To commend, as some have argued, is perhaps more disinterested than to praise, and so the higher compliment. ... And this is hardly a poet whose hand is clumsily forced by the constraints of rhyme.” Augustine also argues that the word “scorn” rebukes Milton for his rude tone, though on p. 146 he quotes Marvell using it without pejorative implication, with its usual connotation of righteous disdain (*First Anniversary*, 388). Instances where *commend* was thought to be a “higher compliment” than *praise* are very few: see Gross, “Pardon Me,” 92 (the last four lines, including the *praise/commend* pairing, constitute “praise even higher than that already offered”); McWilliams, “Marvell and Milton,” 177, n. 44 and Smith, ed., *Poems*, 184, note on line 52 (citing the King James Bible).

⁸⁰ For digitally available texts reading “mis-commend,” see, for example, *The Book of Restoration Verse*, ed. William Stanley Braithwaite (New York: Brentano, 1910), 118.

More in 1657, dismissed with contempt as one who merely “pleases the ears” of his Huguenot congregation.⁸¹ Even while Marvell puts prose polemic into couplets he echoes Milton’s own verse, “transported” being an exceptionally loaded word in *Paradise Lost*. Its uses are inevitably powerful and multivalent, especially when a jealous god imagines his enemies laughing at him for being “transported with some fit / Of Passion” (10.626–7) and when Adam confesses to Raphael his overwhelming desire for Eve:

transported I behold,
Transported touch; here passion first I felt,
Commotion strange. (8.529–31)

As Monica Multer argues, *transport* like *passion* and *commotion* is a striking example of Milton’s “Edenic” use of fallen words newly charged with “regenerative potential” and “sweet Compulsion.”⁸² In “On Paradise Lost” the word is doubly appropriate, as it combines the Miltonic echo with Marvell’s deep-seated affinity with the transverse and the translated.

Even when Marvell seems to apologize for his mediocre conformity, then, he is claiming epic inspiration and high literary credentials. And throughout the poem he has demonstrated that the heroic couplet need not entail “troublesom and modern bondage” or “set off wretched matter and lame Meeter,” as Milton sneered. I suggested above that Marvell deliberately constructs “lame” or hobbled couplets when he needs to parody simplistic criticism without openly denouncing it; elsewhere, as now, he shows how the couplet can sum up large issues with beautiful precision, defining and coupling the central concepts by emphasizing their “like endings”: *spight* versus *sight*, *despise* versus *surmise*, *sublime* versus *rhyme*.

“True musical delight,” Milton asserts, “consists onely in apt Numbers, fit quantity of Syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one Verse into another.” The last of these appears first in Marvell’s poem, reassuring the Mighty Poet as well as the reader that being so firmly “of thy *sense* secure” (46) renders rhyme irrelevant (my emphasis). Milton’s other criteria are summed up in the final couplet:

Thy verse created like thy Theme sublime,
In Number, Weight, and Measure, needs not Rhime. (53–54)

“Needs not” renders Milton’s declaration that rhyme is “no *necessary* Adjunct” of poetry (my emphasis again). In this resonant closing line Marvell reorders a famous

⁸¹ In his letter to Oldenburg in Saumur, Haan, *Epistolarum*, 328–9.

⁸² Multer, “Edenic Co-Motion: Transportive Movements of Passion in *Paradise Lost*,” *Milton Studies*, forthcoming; Multer compares Adam’s erotic transport to Satan’s at *PL* 9.473-4: “with what sweet / Compulsion thus transported.”

verse from the scriptural book Wisdom, which was still canonical for Roman Catholics but safely apocryphal for Protestants, though still admired and quoted. (Even on the Catholic side this was an exceptional verse; Blaise Pascal apparently cited only a single line of scripture in his intellectual quest for religious truth—this one.)⁸³ The author of Wisdom claims that God “ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight” (11:20) but Marvell—emphasizing that these are also the elements of prosody—places *number* first, “apt Numbers” being the first in Milton’s triad of essential qualities. He also indulges in a type of ambiguity that would please Empson: reading the first line as end-stopped makes Milton’s creation “sublime” *tout court*, reading through the enjambment makes it sublime *in those qualities shared with the divinity*.⁸⁴

“Measure” flanked by number and weight once again recalls the state-builder Cromwell in Marvell’s formative *First Anniversary*, now anathema and soon to be struck from all but one copy of the 1681 *Miscellaneous Poems*. When Amphion began to create architecture by playing music “The rougher Stones, unto his Measures hew’d” (51), danced into the building site of their own accord; Cromwell proceeds by

Choosing each Stone, and poysing every weight,
Trying the Measures of the Bredth and Height;
Here pulling down, and there erecting New,
Founding a firm State by Proportions true. (245–8)

In both cases *measure* combines artistic performance, magical creation and political initiative. Cromwell’s already-poetic “weight,” “Measures” and “Proportions” migrate into the full-blown “Number, Weight, and Measure” of 1674, where Milton’s creation and divine Creation merge completely. Moreover, the Wisdom quotation is so resolute and deliberate that alert readers would certainly recall the context and relate it to the central idea of sublimity, the mingling of extreme emotions from horror to delight. The Wisdom writer embeds this assurance of divine “measure” or moderation in a speculation about how his god *could* have punished enemies like Pharaoh even more horribly than he did, unleashing fire-breathing monsters and punitive terrors. And after the rational calm of the *measure-number-weight* sentence the terror returns, with the question that fledgling poets have been asking of Milton ever since: “who can withstand the might of your arm?”⁸⁵

⁸³ Catherine Gimelli Martin, “‘Boundless the Deep’: Milton, Pascal, and the Theology of Relative Space,” *ELH* 63, no. 1 (1996): 78n64 (citing Pascal, but on the dubious authority of Paul de Man).

⁸⁴ Marvell quotes with variation Wisdom 11:20 (21 in some versions). For another use of this “measure, and number, and weight” verse see Achinstein, “Milton’s Spectre,” 24n73.

⁸⁵ Wisdom 11:21 (22 in some versions).

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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