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ESSAY

Justus Lipsius, Andrew Marvell, and Epistolary Style

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While Marvell's letters provide an invaluable resource for Marvell's life and milieu, they also must be understood as carefully crafted artifacts in their own right, illuminating in their artistry as well as in the information they convey. This essay demonstrates the influence of the *Epistolica Institutio* (1591), by Belgian humanist Justus Lipsius, on Marvell's approach to letter-writing, especially in the ways in which Marvell accommodates his stylistic choices to specific rhetorical occasions. Throughout his correspondence, Marvell adheres to the Lipsian definition of the familiar letter and employs various stylistic gambits to further his purposes. His May – June 1663 constituency correspondence, for example, reveals a high level of rhetorical strategizing, in keeping with Lipsian principles, as Marvell attempts to ease his Hull Corporation patrons into the prospect of his participation in the Carlisle embassy to Russia later in the year. Meanwhile, Marvell's August 1667 letter of condolence to John Trott illustrates the close relationship between style and the Lipsian prescription that a letter can be simply a bearer of feeling as well as of news. In light of their often hidden artistry, letter-writing likely served as a source of pleasure for Marvell during his private moments, in much the same way that writing poems did.

Keywords: Andrew Marvell; Justus Lipsius; *Epistolica Institutio*; letter-writing; Hull corporation; familiar letters; constituency correspondence; Carlisle embassy

Extant scholarship citing the influence of the Belgian humanist Justus Lipsius (1547–1606) on Andrew Marvell's writings has centered on Lipsius's status as one of the premier apologists for Senecan stoicism in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Lipsius's major analysis of Stoicism, *De Constantia*, first published in 1584, becomes, for Andrew Shifflett, a master text, in that it helps us to see with great clarity how Lipsian Stoicism was not merely a withdrawal from the active life but a means by which profound anger, the kind that might cause a Fairfax to quit the field, or an MP to become steadfast in opposing corrupt or intolerant government actions, could be mitigated or properly channeled in the service of constancy.¹ In this reading, Lipsius furnishes Marvell and others with a means for comprehending and rationalizing individual agency during fraught times. Seen thus, the Lipsian influence is largely philosophical or ideational, a means of reconciling war and peace.

Yet the ground for examining Lipsius and Marvell in tandem can be usefully expanded if we scrutinize Marvell's approach to letter-writing in relation to Lipsius's *Epistolica Institutio* (1591).² Originally Lipsius wrote this work for the education of students. As he explains to his publisher, the Leiden-based Francis Raphelengius on 28 October 1590, 'let everyone know that I wrote [these principles of letter-writing] for learners, not for the learned; for the young, not for adults; and they are never to be published with the latter in mind'.³ Even so, the

Marvell's letters are cited throughout from the third edition of *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, rev. Pierre Legouis with the assistance of E. E. Duncan-Jones, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

¹ Andrew Shifflett, *Stoicism, Politics & Literature in the Age of Milton: War and Peace Reconciled* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 90–135.

² For more on the life of Lipsius and his contributions to the early modern revival of Stoicism, see Jason Lewis Saunders, *Justus Lipsius: The Philosophy of Renaissance Stoicism* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1955); Basil Anderton, 'A Stoic of Louvain: Justus Lipsius', *Sketches from a Library Window* (New York: Appleton, 1923), 10–29; Rudolf Kirk, 'Introduction', in *Two Bookes of Constancie, Written in Latine by Iustus Lipsius*, trans. Sir John Stradling, ed. Rudolf Kirk (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1939), 3–12; and Leonard Forster, 'Lipsius and Renaissance Neostoicism', in *Festschrift for Ralph Farrell*, ed. Anthony R. Stephens (Bern; Frankfurt am Main; Las Vegas: Peter Lang, 1979), 201–20.

³ Justus Lipsius, *Principles of Letter-Writing: A Bilingual Translation of Justus Lipsius Epistolica Institutio*, ed. and trans. R. V. Young and M. Thomas Hester, The Library of Renaissance Humanism (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 3. All quotations from Lipsius are taken from this edition.

Epistolica Institutio enjoyed a popular vogue in England in the late 1590s and onward, and not simply among young learners. Within the Inns of Court and the literary coterie associated with the Mermaid Tavern, it filtered into John Hoskyn's *Directions for Speech and Style* as well as Ben Jonson's *Timber, Or Discoveries*, and one can also discern its influence in the letters of John Donne and his contemporaries. While Shifflett finds a 'subtle political allegory' in Lipsius's principles of letter writing and finds 'in the Lipsian style an anti-authoritarian and anti-monarchical turn',⁴ the Lipsian definition of epistolary style, itself an implied corrective of Ciceronian ostentation, empowered Marvell the letter-writer more broadly to accommodate his letters to the specific demands of particular occasions. We are accustomed in Marvell scholarship to treat the letters most often as means to an end rather than as ends in themselves. While they have long been a subject of fascination for Marvellians, most often Marvell's letters figure primarily as a source for factual evidence concerning Marvell's biography and his perceptions of the events taking place around him. Thus they become a key source for Annabel Patterson's *The Long Parliament*, for example, to the degree that they merit a bibliographical abbreviation just as much as Anchtel Grey's *Debates of the House of Commons 1667–1694*.⁵

On the one hand, we have a vision of Marvell the utilitarian letter writer, putting off his dinner after a wearying session in the Commons, the committee room, or both, so that he can scribble the latest news in time for the post to keep the Hull Corporation informed.⁶ Such a view suggests his constituency correspondence is

E. Catherine Dunne cites Lipsius's usage of the term, *Institutio*, as further confirmation that Lipsius intended this work to be 'addressed to a young person (young in study if not in years)'. See 'Lipsius and the Art of Letter-Writing', *Studies in the Renaissance* 3 (1956): 146–7.

⁴ Shifflett, *Stoicism, Politics & Literature in the Age of Milton*, 24. As he subsequently notes, 'In Lipsius' epistolary theory and in his letters themselves, res – from the most serious religious and political issues to his gardens and dogs – are always accompanied by a concern with historical and political change', 26.

⁵ Annabel Patterson, *The Long Parliament of Charles II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁶ This perception derives from Marvell's references to the occasional hardships he incurred to maintain his correspondence. In his 2 May 1668 letter to the Hull Corporation, he refers to writing in the post office: 'Tis nine at night & we are but just now risen & I write these few words in the Post-house for surenesse that my letter may not be too late' (*P&L*, 2:74). Elsewhere, Marvell refers to losing his dinner: 'I lose my dinner to make sure of this letter' (2:59); and to losing sleep: 'I am something bound

clerical duty work, each letter merely a carrier of information as opposed to a crafted object unto itself. Indeed, many of the extant letters to the Hull Corporation lend credence to this view, and not just those stressing in passing Marvell's dutifulness. Such letters typically consist of a brief salutation, almost invariably some version of 'Gentlemen my very worthy friends'; followed by a terse account of Commons business in short, unvarnished sentences stressing facts over opinions; and closing with some decorous reminder that Marvell remains the recipients' 'most affectionate' or 'most humble servant'. Such letters offer a wealth of detail about Restoration politics, economics, military, and other affairs, yet as letters they appear to lack the artistry of the Ciceronian correspondence Marvell encountered while a student at university. Function clearly predominates over form; indeed, form is made the most affectionate, most humble servant of function.

Yet here as elsewhere appearances can deceive. Such examples do not encapsulate the whole of the correspondence, and there is more to even the constituency correspondence than initially appears. Particularly in the Miscellaneous letters but also in some of the letters to Hull patrons, Marvell's approach to letter-writing more obviously accords with the vision of Marvell we have from John Aubrey's brief biographical sketch, a vision of the MP as isolate, the man who preferred not to drink in company and who therefore greatly appreciated those periodic casks of ale the Hull burgesses sent him as a reward for his parliamentary work. This Marvell, mistrustful of political enemies and intolerant of fools, perhaps toasting his muse, appears to have taken great pleasure in word craft, especially if in the service of the public good as Marvell perceived it, and this pleasure appears to have extended to the more expansive, more personal letters he addressed to Lord Wharton, William Popple, and others.

But it is a pleasure, I contend, that arises from the skillful adherence to the kind of letter-writing both Hoskyns and Jonson sought fit to capture in their commonplace

up that I can not write about your publick affairs but I assure you they break my sleepe' (*P&L*, 2:26) as a result of Hull Corporation business.

books and in Hoskyns's case, much like Lipsius before him, to transmit to unnamed young men interested in cultivating true eloquence. Lipsius wrote the *Epistolica Institutio* for educating young men who have yet to embark fully on professional careers about the proper art of modern letter-writing, thereby implicitly drawing a contrast between his advocated practice and that derived exclusively from the example of Cicero. But the treatise also becomes the philologist's sustained argument in favor of the paired 'conversational' style Lipsius admired in the writings of the Stoics.

This simplicity is implied in his initial barebones definition of a letter. He considers a letter simply 'A message of the mind to someone who is absent or regarded as absent', the purpose of which is 'either to bear witness to a feeling or to bring up a subject'.⁷ That is all. The notion that a letter should make oneself present to those absent is not surprising. Nor is the utilitarian function of raising a subject to another person, a means of sharing information. Yet the emphasis on the conveyance of affect – 'to bear witness to a feeling' – as equally important as sharing knowledge provides the first clue that more is at stake in the art of letter-writing, as Lipsius understood it, than one might expect. For if the 'message of the mind' is not merely informational, then it must become more immediately mimetic, a conveyance of mind in a deeper, more encompassing sense inclusive of emotion, or else it fails in its effort to bond letter writer and recipient. As his first piece of evidentiary support for his definition, Lipsius quotes Ambrose to the effect that letters should 'join us in affection while we are separated by distances'.⁸ Subsequent writers in England spoke eloquently of the joining power of letters so conceived. In 1598, Donne advanced this idea in the opening lines of a verse letter to Sir Henry Wotton, possibly composed in response to Wotton's own verse letter, 'Tis not a coate of gray':⁹

⁷ Lipsius, *Principles of Letter-Writing*, 9.

⁸ Lipsius, *Principles of Letter-Writing*, 9.

⁹ Ted-Larry Pebworth and Claude J. Summers contend that Wotton's poem was itself a response to Donne's verse letter 'Here's no more newes', which may have offended the older and more experienced Wotton. See "'Thus Friends Absent Speake': The Exchange of Verse Letters between John Donne and Henry Wotton", *Modern Philology* 81.4 (1984): 361–77.

Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle Soules;
 For, thus friends absent speake. This ease controules
 The tediousness of my life: But for these
 I could ideate nothing, which could please,
 But I should wither in one day, and passe
 To'a bottle'of Hay, that am a locke of Grasse
 (ll. 1–6).¹⁰

Here Donne describes the ability of absent friends to speak as a soulful mingling, a full, though disembodied, transport of the writer's being to the recipient. Donne elaborates on this idea in an undated letter to Henry Goodyere, another of his close friends:

I Send not my Letters as tribute, nor interest, nor recompense, nor for commerce, nor as testimonials of my love, nor provokers of yours, nor to justify my custome of writing, nor for a vent and utterance of my meditations; for my Letters are either above or under all such offices; yet I write very affectionately, and I chide and accuse my self of diminishing that affection which sends them, when I ask my self why: onely I am sure that I desire that you might have in your hands Letters of mine of all kindes, as conveyances and deliverers of me to you, whether you accept me as a friend, or as a patient, or as a penitent, or as a beadsman, for I decline no jurisdiction, or refuse any tenure. I would not open any doore upon you, but look in when you open it.¹¹

Donne discounts several of the conventional roles of letters as being too restrictive if viewed in isolation; instead, he touts his letters to Goodyere as 'conveyances and deliverers of me to you' in a more complete sense. Hence he can 'decline no jurisdiction, or refuse any tenure' in his friendship with Goodyere. Of course, in

¹⁰ *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross (New York: Anchor Books, 1967).

¹¹ *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (1651), ed. M. Thomas Hester (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1977), 109.

both of these cases, Donne is writing to a friend, or at least one he perceives as such. The identity of the recipient warranted the warmth shown here.

But in a broader sense, Lipsius's general definition of a letter suggests that the affective content of a letter, whether stated or implied, should be an important consideration in the composition and the interpretation of letters as verbal artifacts. Seen in this way, the elocution of a letter gains in overall importance, in that the 'feeling' it may bear through its selection and arrangement of words becomes as much a part of its content as the information it conveys in a denotative sense. Even in what is purportedly a purely informational letter, one intended merely to 'bring up a subject' – a letter like many of Marvell's constituency letters – the voice and personality captured in the words on the page becomes part of its content from a Lipsian point of view and should be considered as such. Awareness of this point allows us to see more in the letters than might otherwise be readily visible.

Lipsius follows his short definition of a letter with an analysis of its parts and qualities. After advancing a distinction between the conventional elements that all letters share and the varying content distinguishing each kind of letter from the others, he devotes the remainder of his treatise to the close partnership between proper content of a letter, which 'covers no less ground than life itself',¹² and the stylistic elements necessary to convey this content in the spirit of true conversation. He identifies three kinds of letters: the 'serious' letter, which 'pertains to public or private matters' (reports, explanations, consultations, condolences, reminders, requests, rebukes, regrets, recommendations, congratulations, and the like); the 'learned' letter, which '*dresses up a non-epistolary subject* [literary, philosophical, or theological] *in the garment of a letter*'; and most importantly, the 'familiar' letter, '*which touches our affairs or the affairs of those around us, or whatever is unremitting in this life*'. Clearly Lipsius favors the last.¹³ In fact, no sooner does he advance this threefold distinction than he undermines it by admitting that letters can be 'mixt':

¹² Lipsius, *Principles of Letter-Writing*, 21.

¹³ According to Dunne, Lipsius's valuation of the familiar letter is where he most assuredly is 'challenging most of his Renaissance predecessors in epistolary theory'. Dunne, 'Lipsius and the Art of Letter-Writing', 151.

serious and learned letters may partake of the stylistic attributes of the familiar letter, and indeed, they might be better off for doing so.

Furthermore, as he admits later on, his purpose in writing the *Epistolica Institutio* was to formalize the conversational style that most notably distinguishes the familiar letter from the others. This kind of letter best suited conveying the mind's contents through its artful mirroring of face-to-face exchange. Lipsius introduces the general disposition of this style – and its suitability to the familiar letter – in Chapter VI, his 'Few Words' about the role of invention and arrangement, the first and second parts of rhetoric, in the composition of various letter types:

As for invention, what need is there for very copious directions? For it is always at hand, and one does not come to the writing of a letter except with the argument conceived and the mind (as I might put it) bursting. For genuine *familiar letters* the argument is continual; I say nothing here of *serious* or *learned letters*, in which to the contrary, the content is to be amplified or developed in some way; but the books of the rhetoricians will teach you that. Nor yet do I labor to a great extent on *arrangement*, which at best, in a letter, is disregarded or nonexistent. As in conversations we love something careless and disorganized, so is it here. Therefore let us not always answer precisely point-by-point replies; but as it pleases, and as this or that comes to the mind or pen. In general such negligence is decorous, and the great master [Cicero] rightly counsels, 'Letters sometimes ought to digress freely'. And thus he himself hesitates, resumes his argument, disrupts it, and mixes things up; and he seems to care for nothing so much as to display no care at all. On the other hand, for *serious letters*, I do not deny that something more is required in the way of arrangement; but in such a way that you stop short of the diligence of oratory, and take it as a model, not copy it. Why bind yourself with rules? Even as there is some determined order in a commander's battle formation, and yet not one only; so should you deal with each subject: organize according to discretion rather than by topic.¹⁴

¹⁴ Lipsius, *Principles of Letter-Writing*, 23. Lipsius cites Cicero's *Ad Quintum Fratrem*, 2.11, here.

Just as the serious or learned letter might have more of a sense of formal arrangement than the 'decorous' 'negligence' of the familiar letter, so, too, does Lipsius presume a stylistic difference between the conversational style of the familiar letter, founded on the five characteristics of '*brevity*', '*clarity*', '*simplicity*', '*elegance*', and '*decorum*', and the prevailing diction and syntax of the other letter types: 'in a serious or erudite letter', he explains, 'I would be somewhat more diffuse, and some weight of words is to be added to a subject grave in itself'. By contrast, '[i]n a familiar letter, I would be concise, and thin and diverse subjects should not be burdened with a pleated style'.¹⁵

These distinctions pertain to Marvell's correspondence, as time and again Marvell 'writes suitably', in Lipsius's words, to accommodate his occasions and intentions. The constituency correspondence is interesting in this regard because at first glance it suggests an apparent mismatch between audience and style. Technically speaking, in his letters both to the Hull Corporation and to the Trinity House Corporation, Marvell wrote to patrons, those responsible for his election to Parliament and hence for his livelihood. In the former case, he addressed his letters to either the mayor of Hull or to the mayor and aldermen together. His surviving letters were addressed to thirteen of the nineteen mayors who governed during his career in parliament. In the latter case, Trinity House recipients included Marvell's brother-in-law Edmund Pople; yet even so, Marvell here wrote in the capacity of a recognized agent of the wardens of Trinity House, committed to furthering their business. Despite his patronage relationship with both corporations and the implicit need for flattery such a relationship might imply, however, Marvell more often than not eschews elaborate strategies of arrangement and adopts the plain style of the familiar letter. Sometimes both choices appear to be the result of a need for haste, a desire to communicate relevant news as expeditiously as possible, as when he updates Mayor Anthony Lambert and the Hull aldermen on 27 February 1667/8:

Gentlemen my very worthy friends,

This is to acquaint you with the soonest that hauing sat till 8 at night yesterday in a Committee of the whole House, we voted a supply to his

¹⁵ Lipsius, *Principles of Letter-Writing*, 25–7.

Majesty not exceeding the summe of 300000ⁱ and that not to be raised either by a Land-tax or by home Excise. To day we haue been considering of the way but haue adjourned the debate till Saturday it being impossible so soon to come to a resolution. To morrow we returne to the further consideration of the report of the miscarriages of the late warre. I haue nothing more at present but to remain

Gentlemen &c:

Your most affectionate friend to serve you

Andr: Marvell (*P&L*, 2:66)

This complete letter, with its simple three-part structure (yesterday, today, tomorrow), merely addresses a presumed need to know the state of current debates about the Supply Bill during the seventh session of the Long Parliament (the bill passed on 25 January)¹⁶ and the urgent desire of the men of Hull to know how such royal funds might be paid for, a crucial consideration for commerce. Aside from calling his recipients 'my worthy friends' and from declaring himself their 'most affectionate friend', Marvell applies no varnish to his expression. He makes no attempt to butter up his audience. Nor does he pass any judgement on the decisions reported. Instead, he conveys the facts as plainly and briefly as possible, as if he had no more leisure time to do more.¹⁷

Even when not rushed, however, Marvell favors a brief, clear, simple eloquence when speaking to his constituents, as if such qualities were essential to his professional identity as MP. In his 6 June 1663 letter to Mayor Richard Wilson and the Hull

¹⁶ Patterson, *The Long Parliament of Charles II*, 41.

¹⁷ Several of the extant letters Marvell wrote during Mayor Lambert's tenure evince a similar sense of hurriedness. His 19 December 1667 letter, written at the start of the winter 1667–68 adjournment, consists merely of a list of accomplishments during the recently completed session: 'We haue past fiue publick Acts. Act of Accounts. Of making Exchequer orders assignable. For Commis^{rs} to treat with Com^{rs} of Scotland for the opning the trade betwixt both. For naturalizing Prize Shipps. For banishing and disabling the Earle of Clarinden ...' (*P&L*, 2:64). His 15 February 1667/8 letter begins with a statement of inordinate busyness: 'I haue been so busy this weeke that I could not write before and the House hauing sat to day till fiue in the Euening so that I haue but litle time left me, I hope I shall haue your excuse' (*P&L*, 2:65).

aldermen, for instance, he begins with a brief statement of his present circumstances and then proceeds to tell the news without much rhetorical flourish:

The House hauing adjournd yesterday till Friday next I haue got some litle leisure to salute you. I should do it oftner were the businesse of the House so various or communicable as formerly. Beside the Bill to prevent the growth of Popery, that against conventicles seems the most considerable preparing many further remedies against refractory persons. The House hath taken very much pains in his Majestyes revenue and strives to improve such parts of it as seeme to admit of it. But whether there will be yet any addition to the revenue by further aids or levyes before we adjourn againe it is not easy to conjecture. The House is as zealous as euer for his Majesty but is sensible also of the necessityes of the Country. There hath bin lately discovered a plott of some of the old English army in Ireland to seize upon Dublin & the Lord Lieutenant. So disappointed there (*P&L*, 2:37)

Here, Marvell's style evinces a level-headedness in the face of potentially weighty issues. Though he pays his respects to his constituents at the start, his obligations on their behalf are so involved that they preclude his writing more often. He organizes his thoughts not according to any apparent oratorical formula but in the casual way that Lipsius recommends: 'let us not always answer precisely with point-by-point replies; but as it pleases, and as this or that comes to the mind or the pen'.¹⁸ The proposed measures against Popery on the one hand and conventicles on the other seem most urgent in Marvell's mind, so he leads with them. But rather than simply move from one item to the next to the next as he does in the previously cited letter to Lambert, he takes time to editorialize on his perceptions of Parliament's dual interest in supporting the King but not to the detriment of the 'necessityes of the Country'. Then, abruptly, he shifts attention to the discovery of the plot in May to kidnap the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland (James Butler) and 'seize upon' Dublin and its failure

¹⁸ Lipsius, *Principles of Letter-Writing*, 23.

(‘So disappointed there’) before editorializing again, this time commenting on ‘false’ rumors concerning the ‘conspirators’ and reassuring his readers that ‘Gods providence’ in consort with ‘humane care’ will continue to watch over the King. Without further ado, he then closes the letter, again abruptly, with a suggestion that he will be ‘something lesse assiduous at the House’ these next days – but is vague about why (‘some private occasions but relating to the publick’) – and reassures his readers their interests nevertheless will be in the good hands of his fellow Hull MP, Colonel Gilby. Though written for a professional purpose, this letter accords with Lipsian prescriptions for a familiar letter.

We might be tempted to take for granted the arrangement and style of this letter, along with the dozens of other seemingly functional letters like it, as products of unthinking habit rather than of conscious choices. But doing so would be a mistake. Indeed, one virtue of the conversational letter Lipsius describes is its superficial appearance of spontaneous artlessness, a quality Lipsius discerns in some of Cicero’s letters in which Cicero ‘seems to care for nothing so much as to display no care at all’.¹⁹ That Marvell cared greatly about matters of style in his dealings with his constituents becomes more readily apparent if we take a wider view of the correspondence written during this same year. Marvell wrote the 6 June letter a little more than two months after he was forced to resume his post in London after nearly a year in Holland, or else lose his seat in Parliament. From May 1662 to the beginning of April 1663, Marvell was on a secret mission to Holland at the request of Charles Howard, the Earl of Carlisle, once a supporter of Cromwell’s government but now a member of the Privy Council. The true purpose of this mission remains unclear. Was Marvell brought in to aid the efforts of Sir George Downing in rounding up regicides still at liberty? Was he in fact a double agent working for the English government?²⁰ We may never know for certain. Regardless, by February 1663, some influential Hull figures were impatient with Marvell’s absence in Parliament. Chief among them was John, Lord Belasyse, ‘a brave Cavalier’, in Pierre Legouis’s words, and the governor

¹⁹ Lipsius, *Principles of Letter-Writing*, 23.

²⁰ See Nigel Smith, *Andrew Marvell: The Chameleon* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 170–73, for a discussion of these possibilities.

of the Hull garrison.²¹ He wrote first to Sir Robert Hildyard and then, on 5 March, to Mayor Wilson and the Hull aldermen to complain of Marvell's absence and to suggest that a new burgess be elected to replace him.²² According to Nigel Smith, 'Belasyse saw an opportunity to enhance his influence by recommending one of his clients as a replacement'.²³ Mayor Wilson then wrote to Marvell, who promptly returned with reassurances of his diligent service.

Marvell wrote the letter of 6 June, then, during a period when he was restoring his relationship with his constituents. But these efforts occurred when Marvell seems to have been in discussions with Carlisle about leaving his post again, this time as part of the official Carlisle embassy to Moscow to restore the English trade there that had been disrupted as a result of the regicide. This time, given that the embassy was 'public, with royal blessing, and obviously to the national advantage', there appears to have been much less risk of Marvell losing his parliamentary seat.²⁴ Nevertheless, Marvell appears to have carefully considered how best to broach the subject of this new stint abroad in as least a damaging fashion as possible. Part of his strategy seems to have been to ease his constituents into it. In the 19 May 1663 letter informing the Corporation of the Carlisle embassy, he 1) stresses his general conscientiousness in attending to Hull affairs and 2) introduces the embassy as just another news item, without any special significance. But this opening gambit is more than simply a content decision. Listen to how his voice differs from that of some of the other constituency correspondence so far considered:

Gentlemen my worthy friends,

I have something too long owd you answer to yours of 5th of May being confident that as whatsoever kindnesse and respect comes always welcome and timely enough from you to me so that neither you will precisely reckon

²¹ Pierre Legouis, *Andrew Marvell: Poet, Puritan, Patriot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 129.

²² Nicholas von Maltzahn reproduces excerpts of the text of Hull Corporation correspondence about this this complaint, along with that of Belasyse's letter to the mayor and aldermen, in *An Andrew Marvell Chronology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), 72–3.

²³ Smith, *Andrew Marvell*, 173.

²⁴ Smith, *Andrew Marvell*, 173.

the differences of a weeke or a post in my correspondence. Otherwise I could be as punctuall with you as any man living, and with none more willingly then with you, having neuer satisfyd my selfe to the full in writing to you. So much pleasure do I take in that conversation which either the necessity of my attendance on your affairs or the convenience of mine own dos limit me to for the most part, depriving me of that great content which otherwise I might reape sometimes in my presence and society with you. Our Parliamentary affaires giue me no great matter of discourse with you. Yesterday ... (*P&L*, 2:36)

This is a longer preamble than he usually makes when relating news from Westminster, and it is also much more decidedly courtly and intimate. By this point, Marvell, whose linguistic talents were well-known to Carlisle, must have been in discussions with the Earl about the prospect of serving as his secretary for the long-term diplomatic mission that was to embark two months later. Yet rather than lead with or even touch on this possibility, he instead stresses to the Hull Corporation his selfless service. His diction enacts an *energia* of affection, as if to stress he is more than simply MP for Hull but a genuine friend as well. When he comes to the subject of the embassy, he confines it to a single sentence before returning to the dominant theme of this letter, both in content and in style – the warmth of his relations with his constituents:

The Earle of Carlisle is going upon an Extraordinary Ambassage to Muscovy in order to setting up the English trade again there: from thence he is to goe to Sweden & Denmark. I haue nothing further but the continuance of my hearty respects, assuring you that I am

Gentlemen &c:

Your most affectionate friend to serve you (*P&L*, 2:36)

One month later, on 20 June – two weeks after the 6 June letter – Marvell chose to break the news of his accompanying the Carlisle embassy. This time, he affects the

'somewhat more diffuse' and weightier style Lipsius ascribes to the serious letter, which adds 'some weight of words' 'to a subject grave in itself'.²⁵ Indeed, the subject is serious – Marvell wishes to keep his parliamentary seat. His choice of style implicitly conveys his understanding of the gravity of the situation:

Gentlemen my very worthy friends

The relation I haue to your affaires and the intimacy of that affection I ow you do both incline and oblige me to communicate to you that there is a probability I may very shortly haue occasion again to go beyond the sea. For my Lord of Carlisle being chosen by his Majesty his Embassadour Extraordinary to Muscovy Sweden and Denmarke hath used his power which ought to be very great with me to make me goe along with him Secretary in those Embassages. It is no new thing for members of our house to be dispens'd with for the service of the King and the nation in forain parts. And you may be sure that I will not stirre without speciall leave of the house that so you may be free from any possibility of being importuned or tempted to make any other choice in my absence. However I can not but advise also with you desiring to take your assent along with me So much esteeme I haue both of your prudence and friendship ... (*P&L*, 2:37–8)

The weightier style here helps Marvell finesse his central problem: though he posits his absence as unavoidable – and likely wished to go on this trip – he also hopes for the Hull Corporation's official blessing and hence, reassurance that his parliamentary seat will not be jeopardized. Through his respectful language, he offers his own implicit reassurance of his deference to the Corporation as well as his dedication in furthering Corporation business, even during his absence. He presents this new service role as it was: a *fait accompli*. But he strives also to make his constituents agreeable to it.

²⁵ Lipsius, *Principles of Letter-Writing*, 25–7.

The last of the surviving Hull Corporation letters to treat the embassy before Marvell's departure for Gravesend on 20 July 1663 similarly opens with an uncharacteristically ornate style:

Gentlemen and my very worthy friends

Being this day taking barge for Grauesend, there to imbarke for Archangel, so to Muscow, thence for Sweden, and last of all Denmarke, all which I hope by Gods blessing to finish within twelve moneths time, I do hereby with my last and seriousest thoughts salute you, rendring you all hearty thanks for your great kindnesse and friendship to me upon all occasions and ardently beseeching God to keep you all in His gracious protection to your own honour and the welfare & flourishing of your corporation to which I am and shall ever continue a most affectionate and devoted servant. (*P&L*, 2:39)

This opening, a single sentence, is worthy of the most dedicated Ciceronian. Its diction and syntax are in keeping with that of the serious letter on a public matter. Yet more to the point, the language also effects what we might describe as an *energia* of gratitude, not simply the idea of gratitude but its emotional coloring as well. The letter is as much about bearing 'witness to a feeling' as it is about saying goodbye for the time being.

While the Carlisle embassy letters of May – June 1663 are interesting for the implications of Marvell's stylistic choices, the occasional flowery or 'pleated' style is not the norm in Marvell's correspondence. Though apparently mindful of the Lipsian distinctions between letter types and their stylistic requirements, Marvell more often than not adopts the conversational style Lipsius recommends for most letters. Yet here, too, there is often a close relationship between stylistic choice and the affect Marvell wishes to convey. The well-known letter of condolence to Sir John Trott, written in August 1667, is a good example of what Lipsius describes as the 'mixt' kind of letter. Addressing a serious subject on a private matter (the death of Trott's sons), Marvell, in his zeal to offer what comfort he can, turns the occasion to a learned

discourse on famous biblical fathers and sons who faced similar sacrifices. But revealingly, he relates his learning entirely through the conversational style that is the hallmark of the familiar letter, thereby maintaining the decorum of a friend speaking to a friend. '[U]sually the most loquacious are the least eloquent', Lipsius explains, 'As those with puny bodies puff themselves up with clothes, so those destitute of wit or wisdom are prodigal with words'. In the familiar letter, a 'simplicity and forthrightness should shine throughout the composition, and disclose the special candor of a free mind'.²⁶ This description adroitly describes the simple, honest humility of Marvell's advice to Trott:

You, Sir, that have all these things in your memory, and the clearness of whose Judgment is not to be obscured by any greater interposition, it remains that you be exemplary to others in your own practice. 'Tis true, it is an hard task to learn and teach at the same time. And, where your self are the experiment, it is as if a man should dissect his own body and read the Anatomy Lecture. But I will not heighten the difficulty while I advise the attempt. Only, as in difficult things, you will do well to make use of all that may strengthen and assist you. The word of God: The society of good men: and the books of the Ancients. There is one way more, which is by diversion, business, and activity; which are also necessary to be used in their season. But I my self, who live to so little purpose, can have little authority or ability to advise you in it, who are a Person that are and may be much more so generally useful. All that I have been able to do since, hath been to write this sorry Elogie of your Son, which if it be as good as I could wish, it is as yet no undecent imployment. However I know you will take any thing kindly from your very affectionate friend and must humble Servant. (*P&L*, 2:312–3)

The voice here is completely different from that of the Carlisle embassy letters to the Hull Corporation. Gone is the overly involved syntax. Instead, the style accords

²⁶ Lipsius, *Principles of Letter-Writing*, 25, 31.

with Lipsius's prescriptions for 'brevity': Marvell avoids 'mingl[ing] anything superfluous'; he 'flee[s] any long periodic structure' and instead relies on simpler 'clauses, frequently without conjunctions'; and he makes his 'language spare and pure' with only the 'necessary furnishings'.²⁷ His shorter sentences also fit the three conditions Lipsius stipulates for 'clarity', the second criterion for the conversational style, in that the words are 'fitting', 'current', and 'coherent'. Their simple forthrightness causes them to resemble 'everyday conversation'. And their artful arrangement accords with the Lipsian description of stylistic elegance, when the style is '*altogether brisk, lively, and elevated, and reveals a certain attractive grace and charm*'.²⁸ Taken together, these qualities reinforce a perception that this friend speaks from the heart.

Though Marvell writes of a serious subject here, one can see many of these same qualities in the letters to William Popple, the 2 April 1667 letter to Lord Wharton, the 9 August 1671 letter to Thomas Rolt, and numerous others of the Miscellaneous letters. Marvell seldom seemed to pick up his pen without a clear sense of what he was about, not only in argument but in style. A close scrutiny of Marvell's correspondence in light of Lipsius's *Epistolica Institutio*, then, demonstrates that the Lipsian influence is not only philosophical but practical as well. Some years ago Canadian scholar Jeanne Shami cautioned us not to use John Donne's sermons 'as means to other ends, rather than as the end of legitimate scholarly inquiry' because our doing so strips the sermon passages of context and denies the artistry practiced in producing them.²⁹ The same caution, it seems to me, applies to Marvell's letters: while they will always be a crucial source for Marvell's biography and for the cultural and political history of late seventeenth-century England, the letters also evince a literary artistry in their own right – in this case, an art that conceals art, often for the furtherance of plain speaking. Because of this artistry, they likely served as a source of pleasure for Marvell during his private moments, in much the same way that writing poems did.

²⁷ Lipsius, *Principles of Letter-Writing*, 27.

²⁸ Lipsius, *Principles of Letter-Writing*, 33.

²⁹ Shami, 'Donne's Sermons and the Absolutist Politics of Quotation', in *John Donne's Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross*, ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain and Frances M. Malpezzi (Conway, Arkansas: UCA Press, 1995), 383–4.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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