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ESSAY

## Literalizing Value: Poetry, Evaluation, and the Market in Marvell's 'The Last Instructions'

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Andrew Marvell's poetic choices, especially his tendency to literalize metaphors, reveal a dissatisfaction with the growing prevalence of market exchanges in seventeenth-century England. Although his verse satire 'The Last Instructions to a Painter' defends trade against the encroachments of the excise tax, as would be characteristic of a member of Parliament, it also demonstrates a striking aversion to comparative evaluation. 'The Last Instructions' also provides an important supplement to readings of Marvell's literalizing propensities in other poems, like 'The Garden'. Marvell's portrait of trade and value in Restoration England, during the growth of a liberal market regime and the development of finance capital, also has important implications for modern assumptions about productivity and value. This early modern poet anticipates and presciently critiques the ubiquity of consumerist evaluation in our modern world. However, Marvell's verse does not outline an alternative system of social relations: in that respect, even his verse satire does not have much faith in the political power of irony. Instead, these poems turn to literalization so as to advocate withdrawal from a world that asks little more of us than acquiescence to a totalizing web of assessment and evaluation.

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**Keywords:** Marvell; economics; value; exchange; metaphor; literal

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## I

‘Were’t not a price who’d value gold?/And that’s worth nought that can be sold’ (ll. 61–2).<sup>1</sup> The Soul’s response to Pleasure, in Marvell’s ‘A Dialogue Between the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure’, demeans the value of market exchanges.<sup>2</sup> Even the prospect of trading something in the future, the mere ability to sell it, renders something valueless. This line hints at the duplicity at the heart of all market-based trade, and the values and valuations that stem from it: you pretend to value what you do not really value because you are always potentially ready to give it up, if and when the price is right. On the one hand, this is an unsurprising moralization of essential property: that which is really valuable to you – your salvation and your soul – is a property of you (a quality that makes you ‘you’), not your property (a moveable that you might trade).<sup>3</sup> Yet the Soul takes aim here not just at the unscrupulous haggling and marketing practices that would transform such essential property into commodities, but also at the practice of comparative valuation and its parasitic colonization of our every waking hour: *i.e.*, the imperative to approach human experience primarily as a matter of judgment and evaluation (even when those standards come from oneself).

Pleasure promises that all the world shall be available to the Soul in this life and, then, that it will be so flush in the underworld that it will need to discover new continents in order to expend its wealth:

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Marvell, ‘A Dialogue Between the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure’, in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, rev. ed., ed. Nigel Smith (Harlow, UK: Longman, 2007), ll. 61–2. All references to Marvell’s poetry are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> For the contention that all value is ultimately exchange value, see Hannah Arendt, ‘The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance’, in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking, 1954), 204. Throughout, my analysis has benefited from the essays in Sam Ladkin, Robert McKay, and Emile Bojesen, eds., *Against Value in the Arts and Education* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016). I am indebted to Edward Holberton for suggesting that this volume would be pivotal to my argument.

<sup>3</sup> For an account of the ambiguity of the concept of ‘property’ in seventeenth-century philosophical and economic thought, see Andrea Finkelstein, *Harmony and Balance: An Intellectual History of Seventeenth-Century English Economic Thought* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 162.

Wheresoe'er thy foot shall go  
The minted gold shall lie;  
Till thou purchase all below,  
And want new worlds to buy.  
(ll. 57–60)

From Pleasure's point of view, then, you are still shopping in a future afterlife. You are still acquisitive, even imperial, in your consumerist desires. At one level, the Soul's response is standard anti-commercial fare: do not try to trap me in this worldly exchange; my eyes are set on heaven; God will provide whatever I need; I will definitely not be looking to buy new worlds in the afterlife.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the Soul asserts the socially constructed and fundamentally empty nature of worldly valuing. However, there is also a telling portrait of the logic of exchange in Pleasure's portrait of 'purchasing all below'. It reveals the extent to which all trade involves a wager on the future, a guess about what you are going to need or want down the road, even after you are dead and consigned, presumably, to Hades. In that sense, Marvell's Pleasure proposes that all valuing is speculative. The Soul's retort, then, takes issue not only with commercial practices in general, but with the abstractions characteristic of future-oriented markets. That is in part because speculative markets – what today we might call 'derivatives' – are not nearly speculative enough.

The anti-commercial sentiments in this poem jar, of course, with some of Marvell's verse satires written during the same period (the mid-1660s). More specifically, the condemnation of market exchanges in 'A Dialogue' seems decidedly alien to the member of Parliament from Hull who seeks to defend trade against the excise tax in 'The Last Instructions to a Painter':

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<sup>4</sup> For the suggestion that there is a conceptual link between providence and the invisible hand of the market, and between revelation and wealth's infinite expansion, see Blair Hoxby, *Mammon's Music: Literature and Economics in the Age of Milton* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 6.

Excise a monster worse than e'er before  
 Frighted the midwife and the mother tore.  
 A thousand hands she has, and thousand eyes,  
 Breaks into shops and into cellars pries,  
 With hundred rows of teeth the shark exceeds,  
 And on all trade like cassowar she feeds:  
 Chops off the piece wheres'e'er she close the jaw,  
 Else swallows all down her indented maw.

(ll. 131–8)<sup>5</sup>

The distinction, even contradiction, here is not a reason to abandon Marvell as hopelessly confused on economic matters, or as a cagey political opportunist. Rather, these poems' conflicted account of trade and sale – impossible to perform if you truly own or value something; legitimate social activity worthy of protection against parasitic monarchical intrusion – sheds an important light on early modernity's fraught conception of markets, exchange, and speculative finance. Yet Marvell's verse is not just an historical touchstone in this respect, examining, co-opting, and sometimes challenging the comparative and speculative valuations characteristic of market structures. His poems, both lyrics and verse satires, especially those in the 1660s, advance aesthetic valuations that ultimately oppose comparison and rethink speculation as something more than expansion and growth. Markets are always capable of subsuming aesthetics, turning them into a hierarchized system for the maximization of pleasure or prestige, but Marvell's poetic propensities toward literalization and retirement impede such subsumption. I would argue, then, that Marvell's verse not only reacts to early modern proto-economic concepts, but also anticipates and even challenges modern understandings of the economy, especially our present conceptions of valuation and speculation.

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<sup>5</sup> There is also something prescient about this depiction of a financial parasite, insofar as it echoes Adam Smith and the early Marx, both of whom arraign the unproductive extractions of feudalism. For an account of the similarity between Smith's description of the transition from feudalism to capitalism and that of the early Marx, see Robert Brenner, 'Bourgeois revolution and transition to capitalism', in A.L. Beier, David Cannadine, and James M. Rosenheim, eds., *The First Modern Society: Essays in English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 281–5.

Marvell's conflicted portrait of trade in these poems participates in a broader seventeenth-century intellectual trend: seventeenth-century thinkers – philosophers, merchants, and proto-economists – are in the midst of trying to figure out what money and value are. In part, that concern is a response to the growing prevalence of markets and market-like mechanisms in England.<sup>6</sup> The problem of sacramental presence may be the conceptual terrain on which fights about linguistic phenomena occur in the sixteenth century, as Stephen Greenblatt maintains, but in the seventeenth century these intellectual debates begin to shift to the conceptual domains of money, exchange, and value.<sup>7</sup> I would argue that Marvell's conflicted account of trade also matters, beyond the confines of literary study, because it challenges our current exchangeist conception of humanity: *i.e.*, the notion that we are all fundamentally exchanging animals motivated by particular interests and proceeding with a valuing matrix at the ready.<sup>8</sup> Such a conception assumes that if we are not evaluating and weighing opinions and options, then we are ignoring the realities of a complex technological world, which demands more judgment, deliberation, and decision from us than ever (dull, mindless jobs and activities having long ago become the province of automation). The presupposition, of course, is not only that one cannot value anything without a

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<sup>6</sup> Historians remain divided on the general acceptance of trade as a social adhesive. For the contention that wage labor had penetrated most of England's economic structures by the seventeenth century, see Finkelstein, 12, 165. Finkelstein argues here against Joyce Oldham Appleby's broader contention that England, unlike continental Europe, was generally comfortable with market mechanism. See Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 8–9.

<sup>7</sup> See Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 75–109; 136–62; Stephen Greenblatt, 'Remnants of the Sacred in Early Modern England', in Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Sallibrass, eds., *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 342. For my own account of this phenomenon, see *Reading, Desire, and the Eucharist in Early Modern Religious Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 10–20.

<sup>8</sup> For the argument that the concept of 'interests' is a mechanism for reducing and narrowing the range of human motivations, see Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph*, Twentieth Anniversary ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 109; David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2011), 196. For the contrary, and influential, contention that buying and selling is more primordial even than social organization, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 70–1.

broader standard against which to measure it. It is also that we must be valuing things, full stop (let us bracket the question of whether such contentions are merely self-interested pleading on the part of a caste of managerial assessors or neoliberal ideologues). This litany of pieties is precisely what I think we should question in our own age, obsessed as it is with the political relationship between sovereignty and markets, as well as the more quotidian evaluative imperatives that travel under the rubric of 'social media'. Marvell's verse enables precisely this type of challenge by denying value to anything capable of sale and interrogating value as our primary way of relating to the world.

My overarching thesis is that Marvell's poems question whether value is a particularly useful concept in the present, in part because value requires too much speculation about future wants and needs, in part because it makes evaluation our predominate contribution to the world.<sup>9</sup> In that respect, Marvell's verse looks like a prescient critique of a pre-eminently consumer capitalism. However, that critique does not rest on a valorization of labor or productivity at the expense of consumption: work on his pastoral, georgic, and country house poems has already made this clear.<sup>10</sup> His oft-discussed poetic device of literalization is central to

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<sup>9</sup> My argument here is indebted to Judith Anderson's analysis of the centrality of questions of substance to early modern understandings of exchange, metaphor, and value. See Judith H. Anderson, *Translating Investments: Metaphor and the Dynamic of Cultural Change in Tudor-Stuart England* (New York: Fordham UP, 2005), 195.

<sup>10</sup> For the argument that Marvell uses pastoral to figure destabilizing, hyperinflationary economies, and that pastoral's figurative productivity is itself a type of hyperinflation, see Jonathan Crewe, 'The Garden State: Marvell's Poetics of Enclosure', in Richard Burt and John Michael Archer, eds., *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modernity*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 278–9. For the argument that 'Upon Appleton House' ultimately charts the rise of an abstract capitalist value, one that is tantamount to abstract labor value, see Christopher Kendrick, 'Agons of the Manor: "Upon Appleton House" and Agrarian Capitalism', in David Lee Miller, Sharon O'Dair, and Harold Weber, eds., *The Production of English Renaissance Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 30. For the contention that Marvell's mower poems ultimately side with a bourgeois exploitation of labor and repression of women's work, see Rosemary Kegl, "'Joyning my Labour to my Pain": The Politics of Labor in Marvell's Mower Poems', in Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katharine Eisaman Maus, eds., *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 89–118. For Marx's related argument that exchange creates no value, that whatever value is unlocked in exchange must have already been placed there from the start by labor, see Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 3, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Penguin, 1981), 392.

his rethinking of value and exchange. I argue that this poetic tendency does not function as an ironic critique of abstract valuation in the name of a non-alienated substantial valuing, but rather as a rejection of metaphorical *productivity* and the imposition of value as a conceptual matrix. Literalization, then, stems from a suspicion of the evaluative logic at the root of metaphor. This propensity is not a return to hide-bound tradition, but rather a pervasive suspicion of evaluation as an action and value itself as a concept. That, in fact, is how I would read Marvell's generic revisions to epideictic: not as the adoption of a withdrawn impersonal standard of evaluation, as Annabel Patterson contends, but rather as a consistent suspicion of transactional value itself.<sup>11</sup> For Marvell, metaphor is a conceptual problem because it entails transmitting or trading values, either swapping one thing for another or using one thing to transmit something else. His verse frequently literalizes figures, then, so as to escape poetry's tendency to create and distribute value through a process of abstract comparison. His much ballyhooed elusiveness, in verse and politics, should be traced to this general phenomenon as well, an aversion to the negotiations characteristic of market exchange and the duplicitous valuing that always goes along with it.

In a poem like 'A Dialogue Between the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure', trade is a problem because it constitutes value as a retrospective finality – a price that synthesizes all the valuing that has gone before.<sup>12</sup> The speculative risk of poetic creation disappears in such a system. Yet Marvell also does not indict value in the name of a more foundational substance, a gesture that would itself be little more than the reaffirmation of value. Instead, his epideictic lyrics, early and late, reveal dissatisfaction with the corrupt reciprocity characteristic of not only praise, but irony itself. His poems of retirement and verse satires reveal a similar suspicion of the chummy relationship between public decision-making and pastoral *otium*. In other

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<sup>11</sup> See Annabel Patterson, *Marvell and the Civic Crown* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978), 54–55.

<sup>12</sup> For the contrary contention that 'An Horatian Ode' eschews panegyric in favor of praise for liberal state structures for the protection of individual property, see Michael Komorowski, 'Public Verse and Property: Marvell's "Horatian Ode" and the Ownership of Politics', *ELH* 79 (2012): 335. Komorowski also maintains, however, that the Commonwealth is, at least in part, a venture capital scam predicated on the prospect of land wealth in Ireland (331–2).



words, withdrawal and retirement are not misanthropic reactions in Marvell's work (or the work of a bigoted revanchist), but an affirmative thesis about the limitations of deliberation, evaluation, and critique – and the modulating comparative mechanisms that ultimately dominate them all. 'Literalization' is a pivotal poetic gesture in this respect: it is not a return to a substantial ground, but the invention of poetic abstraction; just as importantly, it is a withdrawal from the world of metaphorical productivity and metonymic association, a subtraction that is also not an appropriative extraction. In this respect, his poems become an important site for exploring the conceptual and aesthetic roots of emerging market and finance systems, systems of value that triangulate their comparisons and equations through the abstract measure of money.<sup>13</sup> More broadly, Marvell helps us to examine what the poetic world before finance capital can tell us about the real world after finance.<sup>14</sup> Or to put it in more trans-historical terms: are we consigned to being valuing animals? I argue in what follows that our assumptions about productivity and value seem dubious for a poet like Marvell, who insists not merely on a system of valuation other than that offered by trade and property, but also on the legitimacy of withdrawal from a world that asks little more of us than evaluation.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For Marx's claim that industrial capital will come to dominate finance capital, see Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, part III, trans. Jack Cohen and S. W. Ryazanskaya, ed. S. Ryazanskaya and Richard Dixon (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), 468.

<sup>14</sup> The seventeenth century in England is, of course, marked by important events in the history of economic thought and the development of capitalism: the first bourgeois revolution occurs right in the middle of it, the excise tax becomes a pivotal mechanism for raising revenue (1643), and it concludes with the founding of the Bank of England (1694) and the Great Recoinage (1696). For an account of England as a particularly 'hospitable setting' for the development of a market society as well as developments in the late seventeenth century that contributed to its financial revolution, see Deborah Valenze, *The Social Life of Money in the English Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 4, 31. Valenze also describes the late seventeenth century and its financial products as very similar to our own situation: 'Experimentation with investments was unprecedented from the late seventeenth century through the first third of the next century and would not be repeated until our own era. Money during the early modern period could best be described as functionally unstable: to paraphrase the monetary theorist, money was what money could do' (2).

<sup>15</sup> For the argument that judgment is the bane of any real novelty, see Gilles Deleuze, 'To Have Done With Judgment', in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 126–135.

## II

Marvell's initial indictment of the excise tax in 'The Last Instructions to a Painter' sounds very much like a modern right-wing American discourse about tax parasitism. But it also echoes a leftist condemnation of financial parasitism. Both positions share, of course, the presupposition that properties and products have a value – now and in the future – worthy of protection against unjust, perverse extractions:

Excise a monster worse than e'er before  
 Frighted the midwife and the mother tore.  
 A thousand hands she has, and thousand eyes,  
 Breaks into shops and into cellars pries,  
 With hundred rows of teeth the shark exceeds,  
 And on all trade like cassowar she feeds:  
 Chops off the piece wheres'e'er she close the jaw,  
 Else swallows all down her indented maw.

(ll. 131–8)

One might, of course, chalk Marvell's negative portrait of the excise up to the prejudices of an MP. As William Ashworth notes, Restoration Parliaments consistently worried that a general excise would grant the King financial independence:

These views [those of political arithmeticians], however, could not dispel an underlying fear that a weakening of the land tax at the expense of indirect tax could actually strengthen the power and independence of the monarch. For example, over the first two decades of Charles II's reign, the court favoured the expansion of the excise whenever possible, while parliament ensured it was restricted to as few items as possible.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> William J. Ashworth, *Customs and Excise: Trade, Production, and Consumption in England, 1640–1845* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 104. For Marvell's characterization of taxes as an example of sovereign overreach, in his account of Sidthorpe and Manwaring's defense of the 'forced loan', see *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, in Annabel Patterson et al., eds., *The Prose Works of Andrew Marvell*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 1:186–7. Essentially, both Sidthorpe and Manwaring,

Although such a political explanation for Marvell's characterization of the excise is certainly tempting, the implicit economic argument seems just as important. Namely, Marvell depicts the excise as a monster that rapaciously feeds not on traditional production or property, but trade, itself an abstract potential, a future use of goods, not the goods themselves: 'on all trade like cassowar she feeds' (l. 136). We might attribute that characterization to poetic license or political hyperbole – treating tax as the direct destruction of exchange instead of as an indirect result of increased consumer prices – but there remain important economic implications for such a depiction. Perhaps the most notable is the transformation of trade into a type of substance, even a product.<sup>17</sup> That, of course, is in keeping with the interests of a merchant class still under a hefty amount of suspicion in Restoration England, especially as market mechanisms gradually expanded into new areas of life. But Marvell's line might also indicate a general validation of trade characteristic not only of an MP with Hull's mercantile interests at heart, but also a civic humanist who believes in the value of collective deliberation: *i.e.*, a politician and poet who thinks of discourse – an admittedly metaphorical intellectual trade – as necessary for governance.<sup>18</sup>

'The Last Instructions' does not just offer a throwaway mention of trade and the excise tax, mere ammunition for its satirizing of parliamentary debates and personages. Marvell's focus on trade in this poem stems, in part, from the fact that

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in Marvell's estimation, eliminate the notion of personal property, granting everything to the King in extraordinary circumstances: 'That the Propriety of Estate and Goods was ordinarily in the Subject, but extraordinarily in the King; that in the case of the King's need, he hath right to dispose them' (187).

<sup>17</sup> For the creative power of metaphorical exchanges, see Anderson, 195. Anderson focuses here on Gerrard de Malynes, especially the ways in which he ultimately backs away from the groundlessness of creative exchanges (205). I am trying to take Anderson's matrix and apply it to Marvell, to examine the ways in which the imagination is a speculative and measuring faculty, and the ways in which the latter task is fundamentally different than the former.

<sup>18</sup> For a portrait of Marvell as precisely this sort of civic humanist, see Phil Withington, 'Andrew Marvell's citizenship', in Derek Hirst and Steven N. Zwicker, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 102–121. For Marvell's defense of merchants against Samuel Parker's indictment of them as fomenters of faction and schism, see Marvell, *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, 94, 104, 117–118, 200.

his poem responds to Edmund Waller's *Instructions to a Painter*, which presents the Dutch wars as mercantilist, and imperialist, conflicts over trade. Equally important is the political context in which Waller's poem appears: *viz.*, Waller's praise for the King's defense of trade occurs during the House of Commons' inquiry into the King's use, or misuse, of war supply funding.<sup>19</sup> For Waller, trade is not an independent action or task worthy of protection, so much as it is a type of service, one that the monarch protects, but also benefits from:

His high command to Afric's coast extend,  
And make the Moors before the English bend;  
Those barbarous pirates willingly receive  
Conditions such, as we are pleased to give;  
Deserted by the Dutch, let nations know,  
We can our own, and their great business do ...  
(ll. 47–52)

But your great providence no colours here  
Can represent, nor pencil draw that care,  
Which keeps you waking, to secure our peace,  
The nation's glory, and our trade's increase ...  
(ll. 317–20)<sup>20</sup>

In Waller's poem, the King is both the protector of trade and its beneficiary, an unrepresentable paragon of selfless self-interest, protecting and promoting English merchants, but also gaining in wealth as a result of their activities. For Marvell, though, the King does not simply protect or promote trade. Rather, his supply needs and the means to obtain them – the excise – threaten trade: *i.e.*, sovereignty is the

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<sup>19</sup> See Patterson, 126.

<sup>20</sup> Edmund Waller, 'Instructions to a Painter', in *The Poems of Edmund Waller*, ed. G. Thorn Drury (New York: Greenwood, 1968). Subsequent references to Waller's poem are to this edition and include line numbers in parentheses. I have also consulted Edmund Waller, *Instructions to a Painter* (London: Henry Herringman, 1666), Early English Books Online.

enemy of trade because it too is an extractive mechanism. Marvell's portrait of the excise, then, looks forward, however hazily, to liberal economic theory, the work of Smith and Ricardo that seeks to tamp down mercantilist interventions in a self-regulating market system.

As Ashworth notes, the excise does its part in transforming trade into a reliable, predictable phenomenon. Most significantly, it turns out that the excise office does not restrict trade so much as it regularizes commodities and, ultimately, if paradoxically, increases consumption.<sup>21</sup> Although the English excise tax sometimes functions as a customs duty applied to imports, its general purpose is to tax goods produced domestically, prior to sale. In other words, it usually taxes future market exchanges. The tax under consideration in Parliament, a 'general excise of all things', would have expanded the excise to all items purchased.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the government had very quickly become cognizant that barter was a way to evade the excise, and in 1645 (the tax itself was first instituted in 1643) insisted that barter trade of excised goods was still subject to the tax.<sup>23</sup> In short, when Marvell defends 'trade' against the cassowar, I think we should consider that that is a more nebulous term than we might suspect in 1667.<sup>24</sup> Does it mean the defense of domestic markets (potentially governed by excise taxes), domestic barter outside of such markets, international exchanges, or the transformation of already existing systems of 'trade' into matters for the market? That is, by putting a potential price on everything made, the excise makes everything part of a market economy, even if it's not purposed for sale or barter: 'That's worth nought'.

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<sup>21</sup> Ashworth, 37, 44.

<sup>22</sup> See John Milward, *The Diary of John Milward*, ed. Caroline Robbins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 21. For a description of the proposed tax as 'an inland excise on all that is used by the buyer, viz., for back or belly, as it is in Holland', see *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, Charles II, 1667*, vol. 7, ed. Mary Anne Everett Green (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1968), xxxvi. For the contention that Marvell's poem is actually the 'fullest authority' on this debate in the Commons, see John M. Wallace, *Destiny His Choice: The Loyalty of Andrew Marvell* (Cambridge UP, 1968), 173.

<sup>23</sup> Ashworth, 96.

<sup>24</sup> For the argument that 'trade' is the term under which matters of wealth and exchange get debated in the seventeenth century, see Hoxby, 5. Hoxby also notes that it is soon after the Restoration that 'speculation' comes to have an economic meaning, right around 1666 (169).

Thus, I think we should see in Marvell's poetic opposition to the excise an aversion to commercial capital or the expansion of market mechanisms into local domains, despite his avowed support for trade itself. I do not think that Marvell is simply mistaken in his understanding of economics here. Nor do I think that this moment in the poem is a throwaway deployment of traditional parasite imagery. Although 'The Last Instructions' opens with avowed support for trade against monarchical intrusion, the poem ultimately challenges the validity and utility of market value, because such valuations rest on the presupposition that all value rests on a thing's potential (and thus abstract) future market price. In that sense, a system that promises to be about risk, competition, and futurity ends up being nothing of the sort. It colonizes the future with the sameness of evaluation: *i.e.*, there is no such thing as speculation after all. That portrait of the limitations of market evaluations, I argue, reveals Marvell's own fraught relationship to early modern market advances, but also has important consequences for our own understanding of the ubiquity of economic valuation in the present.

'The Last Instructions' concludes by stepping out of the advice-to-a-painter genre and addressing the king, however deferentially and obliquely. That address is important in form (rhetorical and poetic) as well as content. The great danger that evil counselors pose to the nation is that they will separate fictional identities, a series of metonymies explicitly presented as mythological:

Bold and accursed are they that all this while  
 Have strove to isle our monarch from his isle,  
 And to improve themselves, on false pretence,  
 About the Common-Prince have raised a fence;  
 The kingdom from the crown distinct would see,  
 And peel the bark to burn at last the tree.  
 (But Ceres corn, and Flora is the spring,  
 Bacchus is wine, the country is the King.)

(ll. 967–74)

The metonymies in this parenthesis outline identities and substitutions, not metaphorical exchanges and expansions. Marvell presents these metonymies as a symbolic series of names so obvious to everyone that it only needs parenthetical recitation. Significantly, literal equations and the replacements that they proffer do not build out to a growing, expanding universe, but rather restrain the very delving between bark and tree that can have only destructive consequences. Marvell's parenthesis does not adumbrate any consequences for these equations. There is no value added to the world because Flora is the spring.

This portion of the poem turns on an image used, at least since the sixteenth century, to indict the divisiveness of merchant activity. For example, Thomas Lever uses delving 'betwixte the barke and the tree' as a figure for merchants' gouging of honest workers.<sup>25</sup> Marvell uses the same image in 'The Mower against Gardens' to figure unnatural dealing:

And yet these rarities might be allowed  
 To man, that sov'reign thing and proud;  
 Had he not dealt between the bark and tree,  
 Forbidden mixtures there to see.  
 No plant now knew the stock from which it came;  
 He grafts upon the wild the tame:  
 That the uncertain and adult'rate fruit  
 Might put the palate in dispute.

(ll. 19–26)

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Lever, *Sermons: 1550*, ed. Edward Arber, *English Reprints* (Westminster: A. Constable and Co., 1895), 6:130. John Heywood's collection of epigrams characterizes this phrase as a warning against interfering in marital relationships, whereas John Lyly's *Euphues* treats it merely as a proverb condemning curiosity. See John Heywood, *A Dialogue of the Effectual Proverbs in the English Tongue Concerning Marriages*, in *The Proverbs, Epigrams, and Miscellanies of John Heywood*, ed. John S. Farmer (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), 57; John Lyly, *Euphues and His England*, in vol. 2, *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, ed. R. Warwick Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 46.

Perverse and monstrous, but also the act of a sovereign authority, the intervention between bark and tree does not really ruin all the productive, proprietary growth that we might expect from the unadulterated plant. Rather, it just puts it to different ends, in this case confusing the palate of judicious tasters. The perverse parasite or unnatural grafter is not threatening value, but demanding an ever more careful attention to it, as well as its endless proliferation as a second-order phenomenon requiring deliberation (fruitless discussion, but discussion nonetheless). And as almost goes without saying, this catachresis that is nonetheless productive – that is metaphor. The sweet fields lie forgot because, frankly, there is no dispute about them and their value.

In contrast to 'The Mower Against Gardens', 'The Last Instructions' presents getting behind the bark to the tree as the great danger, not because of a resultant deviation from propriety, but rather because all such intervention is a prelude to destruction: 'The kingdom from the crown distinct would see,/And peel the bark to burn at last the tree' (ll. 971–2). In other words, delving into the named essence of a tree risks introducing a distinction between symbol and symbolized that would allow for, even require, a proliferation of value and exchanges. That is, the very structure of penetrating beneath a shell to the more important meat or nugget requires a dangerous logic of valuation: *i.e.*, this outside is mere covering; what is truly valuable lies within. That logic, of course, is also the logic of a literary criticism built on allegorical depth. In 'The Last Instructions', Marvell's solution to that problem is to treat the signs for things – Ceres, Flora, Bacchus, country – as merely identical to the things themselves – corn, spring, wine, the king. In other words, he proliferates equations or copular statements without value, as opposed to enacting a metaphorical exchange or transaction. What is important about this solution is that it is a tossed off substitution of names – or abstractions – that sits still, putting one in place of another. What it is definitely not: an exchange of names, symbols, or properties that ends up adding value. There is not a foundational propriety that requires protection against misnaming, or parasitic rentiers. Instead, the poem



simply and casually (it is a parenthesis, after all) records semiotic equivalences, but does not translate one thing into another. That is why it is not a metaphor. The poem then does not seek to protect or correct property values, but rather to use these equations to ensure a future in which new values *cannot* be created. That is not the position of a miserly reactionary or a nihilist, but rather a recognition that valuation, even at its most virtuous and noble, means putting something up for sale. Marvell here hints at the extent to which any future worthy of the name would need to challenge the tyranny of value and its endless requirements for declaration and demonstration.<sup>26</sup> That insight, I think, has important consequences for modern economic thought, as well as for our conception of our daily activities. I think that we have come to assume precisely what Marvell seeks to avoid: that we must be judging and valuing things – commodities, experiences, relationships – constantly.

Waller's *Instructions* provides Marvell with a model in this instance as well. However, Waller's comparable list is one of possession, not metonymic identity, and includes weapons, real or metaphorical, not foodstuffs:

GREAT Sir! disdain not in this piece to stand,  
 Supreme commander both of sea and land:  
 Those which Inhabit the celestial bower,  
 Painters express with emblems of their power;  
 His club Alcides, Phoebus has his bow,  
 Jove has his thunder, and your navy you.

(ll. 311–16)

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<sup>26</sup> For the argument that Marvell's poetry, especially 'The Garden', proceeds only indirectly, by hints and not declarations, see Rosalie Colie, *My Echoing Song: Andrew Marvell's Poetry of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970), 176. For the contention that demonstration is a second-order showing (*i.e.*, 'showing that you are showing'), see Marilyn Strathern, 'The Authority of Value and Abjection from Value', in *Against Value*, 40. For a depiction of 'not-for-profit experience' and 'recessive action' that informs my argument here, see Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2008), 2–3, 21.

Marvell, of course, ridicules Waller's panegyric by altering this sequence in two important ways: he changes the list from one of possession to one of identity; the terms in that list cease to be useful tools, like clubs and navies, and are instead only ways of renaming something. I do not think this is mere inconsequential hyperbole on Marvell's part, but rather indicates a general suspicion of the utility of possession: *i.e.*, owning a tool always implies that one can use it, or refrain from using it. That is, a king who needs to be enjoined to use his powers is at least potentially feckless. Marvell's metonymies imagine a king who is so literally identical to the larger entity that he 'symbolizes' that his support for the nation is automatic.<sup>27</sup> In other words, Waller's poem praises the wrong thing: the king's potential power – what he owns and can wield. The danger of such praise is that the tool becomes the master: witness the inversion in which it is the navy that owns the king. Marvell's alteration of this formula replaces ownership with identity so as to avoid such problems of distributive power and the very possibility of exchange: one might be able to sell one's navy, but certainly not one's country.

This concluding passage in 'The Last Instructions' also echoes, with some important differences, Marvell's use of the *signatura rerum* tradition in 'The Garden' and 'Upon the Hill and Grove at Bilbrough': that is, the notion that names for things are divinely inscribed. In 'The Garden', the divinely inscribed name does not reaffirm identity against the depredations of evil counselors. Rather, that poem attempts to right a process of misnaming by returning to the fair trees their proper name:

Fond lovers, cruel as their flame,  
Cut in these trees their mistress' name.  
Little, alas, they know, or heed,  
How far these beauties hers exceed!  
Fair trees! Wheres'e'er your barks I wound,  
No name shall but your own be found.

(ll. 19–24)

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<sup>27</sup> For the contrary contention, that 'country' here signifies the country party in Parliament – the one opposed to the excise tax – and, thus, makes this line a brand of political nudging, see Wallace, 179.

'The Garden', then, offers a proper and proprietary naming as the antidote to the multiplying inscriptions of fond lovers, but its speaker also promises a supernumerary wounding: *i.e.*, the speaker does not promise to leave the trees alone, but to supplement them correctly. The metonymic identities that close 'The Last Instructions' possess important differences. First, in the verse satire, they inscribe another name, but do so within the poem, not in the physical matrix of nature. In other words, this poem stages a series of free-floating speculative identifications, not the correction of an inscriptive parasitism present in 'The Garden'. In 'The Garden', the great danger is perversion; in 'The Last Instructions', it is delving itself, the notion that there is something underneath or behind the bark.

The problem that delving poses, then, is not just bad counsel. It is the problem of value itself, that behind or beneath a thing is where its true value resides. That is true of poems and their meaning, just as it is true for any consumer good: a buyer must believe that he knows something that the seller does not – namely, the commodity's true value, unrecognized or unappreciated by the seller. That is where Marvell's aesthetic predilections for literalization reappear with a vengeance. A literal word is a simple, to the point of simplistic, equation, the reduction of a word to its singularly essential components. That is a difficult thing to accomplish, not because of the self-contradictions of the plain style, but because of poetry's own propensity to expansive metaphor and productive evaluation: *i.e.*, its propensity to build out worlds.

These poems' different and evolving deployment of the *signatura rerum* gesture, then, highlight the ways in which value itself is a parasite, an abstract addition that perverts the otherwise regular functioning of a tree (or a country) or exploits that functioning in some capacity. In other words, this shared deployment shows how the difficulty in locating the threat that parasitism poses to value resides in the fact that value is itself the parasite. The successful parasite, as opposed to the inept thief, finds or creates a value that its host does not recognize or realize, and then extracts this invented surplus, as if it were a symbiotic Samaritan. Even

in a poem like 'The Garden', which gives us your standard property argument, Marvell shows us value's implication in the parasitic action: writing names on trees other than their own amounts to a violation of propriety; it is parasitically dangerous insofar as it ignores trees' true ends. Yet that violation is not just the colonization of a tree's true value: it is the imposition of value – again, always imagined as on the road to exchange – as a recording apparatus, the addition of that presupposition about trade to a structure that is purportedly about analytic abstraction. After all, calling an oak 'oak' does not change the tree: it is just as superfluous as are the mythological equations in 'The Last Instructions'.

Even the verse satire's inversion of the symbolic sequence in the final set of terms, country and king, emphasizes this point: country is to king as Ceres is to corn. So the country – the thing – symbolizes the king – the synecdochic name – in the same way that Ceres embodies corn, inside of a fictional pantheon. When modern criticism finds in Marvell a tendency toward un-metaphor and literalization, I think that it highlights precisely this aspect of his poetics, and his politics: namely, literalization does not mean a return to the more valuable substantive letter, but the acknowledgment that the letter is a valueless creation, an abstraction that is merely there to record. The problem for Marvell, of course, is that recording is also cannibalizing: it transforms, transposes, and otherwise adds value to the real. Calling the oak 'oak' incorporates the tree into a broader linguistic network, itself one of recognized values, and thus weighs it down with yet more relational value. To put it in the terms of political economy, we are laboring under the tyranny of value. When we are not proving our worth to some absent authority, we are organizing the world according to a hierarchy of value and judgment: *i.e.*, we are using it efficiently, but we are also accounting for it, putting it into tabular form. The way to resist that, if we want to, is not with a return to a more primordial essential property or its analogue, an outsourced standard of evaluation like exchange. Those mechanisms still feed a market mechanism – liberal or neo-liberal – in which there is only one universal imperative: not so much 'consume', but 'evaluate'.

These questions about literary form are of special importance in 'The Last Instructions' because Marvell deviates from his usual poetic practice in his closing address to the king: he merely offers a bare sequence of metonymic identities, instead of depicting or self-reflexively explaining the process of sign-making or identification.<sup>28</sup> As an example of his more frequent practice, 'The Garden' contends that Apollo and Pan are both engaged in a process of symbol construction equivalent to poetic practice:

Apollo hunted Daphne so,  
 Only that she might laurel grow;  
 And Pan did after Syrinx speed,  
 Not as a nymph, but for a reed.  
 (ll. 29–32)

We see the same focus on exposition in 'Eyes and Tears', where the speaker displays the various transmutations that ultimately authorize a conflation of eyes and tears. First, tears appear as 'the true price of all my joys' (l. 12). By the poem's end, however, the speaker imagines merging eyes and tears into a single unit, akin to Crashaw's penchant for rendering orifices and liquids indistinguishable:

Thus let your streams o'erflow your springs,  
 Till eyes and tears be the same things:  
 And each the other's difference bears;  
 These weeping eyes, those seeing tears.  
 (ll. 53–6)

This poem does not describe an already achieved identification of eyes and tears, but it does follow 'The Garden' in charting the process through which such

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<sup>28</sup> For this insight, I am indebted to a comment by Martin Dzelzainis, at 'Andrew Marvell (1621–1678) and Europe: An International Interdisciplinary Conference', sponsored by Université de Haute Alsace-Mulhouse and Université de Strasbourg, 23–25 June 2016.

identification would occur. 'Eyes and Tears' simply locates that process in a future, whereas 'The Garden' locates it in a mythological past. What is perhaps most important is the way in which 'The Last Instructions' offers only a sheer, even blank affirmation of metonymic equations, instead of exposing or even meditating on the process that creates those equations.

Marvell's verse recognizes not only that all value is illusory, whether based on utility or exchange, but also that it is impossible to conceive it outside the presuppositions of exchange. Thus, there is more at work in 'The Last Instructions' than political satire. There is not a ready-made means of escaping exchange value in this poem, although I would like to note one important anomaly in that sequence of metonymic identities: 'King' comes after 'country' not merely so that the monarch can occupy the purportedly more substantial position in the sequence, and not only to score a political point for the country party, but also because 'king' rhymes with 'spring'. In other words, the vicissitudes and the aesthetic pleasures of homophony intervene in order to turn 'King' into the more substantial partner, the thing signified. That is an aesthetic preference that can certainly be yoked to a system of value, valuation, and exchange, but it is also one that impedes the swapping of one thing that one owns for another thing that one does not. Rhyme only makes sense, or feels pleasurable, if everything stays where it is, instead of changing hands and issuing in a broader value-added notion, like harmony. These lines also acknowledge the fundamentally speculative and supplementary quality of all valuation, even within a market system, which requires the projective logic of marginal utility. After all, readers anticipate a rhyme not only because they are used to couplets, but also out of a desire for aesthetic harmony. Marvell, in sum, is trying to think what it means for the future to be something other than the creation, which essentially amounts to the addition, of new values.

### III

Marvell's suspicion of comparative evaluative systems and market valuation matters for a discussion of postmodern, late-stage capitalism, dominated by both information and symbolic branding and finance, but not because his verse gives us one more

way to slam capitalism. We do not need seventeenth-century verse satires for that. Rather, his poems offer a challenge to an increasingly centralized and abstract system of comparison, but do so not in the name of preserving a more traditional system of value. Instead of such a reactionary position, Marvell presents speculation as something more creative and more interesting than merely the invention of more value, more goods, more rights, more phenomena that will all ultimately be commensurable. That is an aesthetic question, certainly, about the nature of figuration and comparison, about the limitations of metaphor, and even metonymy. But it is also a question about the nature of the literal, whether the letter can ever act as a substantial value or ground given its own fundamental abstraction.

Marvell does not seem to have much faith in the social efficacy of satire and its ironies. 'The Last Instructions', after all, acknowledges that its reformist gestures are all feigning on the part of artists, visual or literary: 'So thou and I, dear painter, represent/In quick effigy, others' faults, and feign/By making them ridiculous, to restrain' (ll. 390–2). That's a bow to satire's traditional function and definition, but one that also emphasizes its ineffectuality.<sup>29</sup> I am maintaining here that Marvell's verse pegs this ineffectuality to the fact that the verbs that modern criticism takes to be politically active – undermine, subvert, ironize – still swim in the same stream: value as revaluation and valuation itself as power. That might make lots of sense to modern consumers, but it is probably flat-out wrong. 'The Last Instructions to a Painter' is a poem that announces itself, after all, as the last in a series of satires, the absenting of oneself from reforming advice, however ironic, not the continuation of a social reform project. That leave-taking is not despair, but rather a means of highlighting the limitations of all such derivative evaluative operations. After all, Marvell does this repeatedly, throughout his career: 'The Garden', 'Upon Appleton House', 'The Last Instructions', all chart an

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<sup>29</sup> For the contention that 'The Last Instructions' uses low-minded vulgarity to indict court corruption, see Steven N. Zwicker, 'Virgins and Whores: the Politics of Sexual Misconduct in the 1660s', in Conal Condren and A.D. Cousins, eds., *The Political Identity of Andrew Marvell*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990), 97. I would contend that disgust cannot be put to respectable deliberative uses and that its deployment in this poem signals Marvell's conviction that satire and deliberation are ineffective.

escape or withdrawal from evaluative relationships, whether social, political, or intellectual.

Marvell's verse satires are decidedly different from his satiric prose. The rhetorical structure of the latter encodes the impossibility of ever truly vanquishing an adversary, of ever really doing what one claims to want to do. Animadversion can get you only so far, because the convention requires point-by-point refutation, and thus the reproduction of the very thing you are trying to demolish. In sum, do you ever really exchange one idea for another if you must refute one idea by juxtaposing another to it? That, I think, is one of the central revelations of Marvell's verse satire, that deliberation itself, even in its most effective form, threatens to stabilize and affirm the given. When Marvell derides the excise debate in the Commons in 'The Last Instructions', it is not only because it has degraded from some prior ideal, but because it is a decidedly 'public game' (118).<sup>30</sup> The honorable and productive gestures of political debate (*i.e.*, 'taking a stand' and 'standing up for what you believe') ultimately cede too much authority to the public game of a given politics and the evaluative imperatives that subtend it.<sup>31</sup> Marvell's verse frequently seeks to escape the

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<sup>30</sup> For a complementary reading of this moment in the poem, see Wallace, 175. Smith notes that 'The Last Instructions' casts even Marvell's allies as part of the corruption and disorder in parliament. See Nigel Smith, *Andrew Marvell: The Chameleon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 205.

<sup>31</sup> For Marvell's portrait of Parliament as a glad-handing club where no real debate occurs, see *An Account of the Growth of Popery*, in *Prose Works*, 2: 304–5:

By this long haunting so together they are grown too so familiar among themselves, that all reverence of their own Assembly is lost, that they live together not like Parliament men, but like so many Good-fellows met together in a Publick House to make merry. And which is yet worse, by being so thoroughly acquainted, they understand their Number and Party, so that the use of so publick a Counsel is frustrated, there is no place for deliberation, no perswading by reason, but they can see one anothers Votes through both Throats and Cravats before they hear them. Where the cards are so well known, they are only fit for a Cheat, and no fair Gamster, but would throw them under the Table.

I even think that this tract's presentation of Parliamentary debate serves as a mockery of deliberation and the journalistic recounting that attends it. For example, Marvell frequently introduces opposing views with a spare marker: 'On the other side, several spoke to this effect' (361). I read this gesture as, in part, a bored indictment of a debate (and a journalism) that amounts to little more than the itemization and cataloguing of conflicting positions.



claustrophobia of this political domain: a world in which contests are always over the same type of values – power and the resources that enable it – and, thus, are not really contests at all.

Marvell levels the charge of futility at satire, at least in part because it amounts to more evaluative relationships, yet another addition to an economic, political, and social world already teeming with them. What that means for poetry, I think, is that we should rethink how we talk about literature in a public discourse increasingly dominated by economics, a discourse that thinks itself as the real analysis of real value. I would simply suggest that, for Marvell at least, poetry is the real analysis of the limitations, superfluousness, and parasitism of value. Marvell is the poet who consistently attempts to show us that relation is not king. Or rather, that relation, a concept as expansive and vague as neoliberal economics' 'maximization', is a problem precisely insofar as it always aspires to be king.<sup>32</sup> What that means for economics and a leftist politics that wants to challenge its assumptions is somewhat narrower perhaps, but no less important: namely, you cannot fight finance with substance, essence, pragmatics, the true, or the real, because you are still fighting value with value. In other words, you think you are fighting, but really you are just trading.

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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<sup>32</sup> For a compelling account of the conceptual slipperiness of 'maximization' within economics, see David Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 8.

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