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### Essay

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## ESSAY

## Materiality and Satire in Marvell's "The Last Instructions to a Painter"

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In "The Last Instructions to a Painter," Marvell articulates and then critiques the idealizing ethos of the Stuart regime by using a rhetoric of corporeality to reveal the limitations and falsity of this ideological vision, and to censure the corruption and misgovernance at the center of the body politic. Marvell employs the tradition of *ut pictura poesis* to frame his analysis of Stuart political culture and its notions of agency embodied by king and court. But Marvell reconceives the notion of *ut pictura poesis*, so that instead of being a vehicle for the expression of cultural ideals he invests it with a new, transgressive energy that is able to challenge patriarchal understandings of power. In addition, by intertwining the political and artistic spheres, Marvell is able to develop a theory of satire grounded in the materiality of human/nonhuman bodies that anticipates the modern philosophy of vitalism. The focus on human/nonhuman bodies helps to open up an imaginative space that extends agential possibilities to a dynamic material realm that complicates human-centered notions of agency and calls into question hierarchies of power. This vitalistic philosophy in turn helps to clarify and explain how the entangling of the materialities of the human and natural worlds in Marvell's "Last Instructions" helps the poet to develop a sophisticated and expansive satiric voice while at the same time enabling him to critique the debased political realm of seventeenth-century England.

**Keywords:** Marvell; satire; vitalism; materialism; *ut pictura poesis*; body politic

Speaking of the early modern body politic, its imbrication within systems of patronage and service, and its close relation to the patriarchal family, Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker make the heuristic claim that "political programmes were inevitably experienced in and through the body, doubtless with the mind but just as surely through the senses and the feelings, all the range of affect."<sup>1</sup> This Marvellian think-

<sup>1</sup> Derek Hirst and Steven N. Zwicker, *Andrew Marvell: Orphan of the Hurricane* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 151.

ing through the body assumes a new and multi-layered form in "The Last Instructions to a Painter" in that the human/nonhuman bodies permeating the poem open up and complicate the boundaries dividing conventional dualities such as body and language, ideality and materiality, nature and culture, and male and female. By using the materiality of bodies to scrutinize privileged cultural binaries, Marvell, even as he partially reinscribes the asymmetrical political and sexual relations implicit in these categories, attempts to reveal their reductive nature. To this end, Marvell implicates them in a vital, complex and insistent material realm which enables critiques of masculine authority and calls into question the efficacy of human agency, in both its political and artistic forms. Furthermore, Marvell employs the concrete materiality of bodies to counterbalance the excessive and overinflated rhetoric of Charles II and his court, a rhetoric that attempts to gloss over the corruption, both political and sexual, at the heart of Stuart court culture. So, even as Marvell articulates the idealizing ethos of the Stuart regime, with its emphasis on "themes of abundance and liberality" in the service of a narrative of national renewal,<sup>2</sup> he also uses a rhetoric of corporeality, especially as it relates to female bodies, to reveal the limitations of this masculinist ideological vision, and to censure the corruption and misgovernance at the center of the body politic. Such attention to corporeality enables the creation of an imaginative space that expands the scope of agential possibility to a dynamic material realm that complicates human-centered notions of agency and helps to renegotiate lines of power. Thus, Marvell's focus on bodies, and their relation to politics and art, allows him to develop a satiric method which gives voice to his dissatisfaction with the dominant political and sexual hierarchies of the Restoration era.

Initially, the framing technique that Marvell employs to advance his analysis of Stuart political culture is that of *ut pictura poesis*. Annabel Patterson remarks on how the tradition of *ut pictura poesis*, dating back to Horace's *Ars Poetica*, with its focus on the relation between painting and poetry, was particularly resonant in a Stuart court where political portraiture and royalist verse coexisted and functioned

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<sup>2</sup> Steven N. Zwicker, *Lines of Authority: Politics and English Literary Culture 1649–1689* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 92.

as a "medium for political influence" and a vehicle for "royalist ideals."<sup>3</sup> However, although *ut pictura poesis* became associated with "an ideal of perfection, whether physical or moral"<sup>4</sup> related to the initial promise of the Restoration, Marvell reverses its idealizing force and uses it as a powerful tool for satirizing Charles II and critiquing the governmental vice and incompetence that led to the disastrous English defeat in the Second Dutch War of 1667. Also, instead of focusing on which of the arts is superior, Marvell views their relationship in terms of what Patterson calls "cross-fertilization" or "Simodean interchange"<sup>5</sup> and often presents painting and poetry as equivalent or complementary arts: "Say, Muse, for nothing can escape thy sight/(And, painter, wanting other, draw this fight)" (147–8).<sup>6</sup> In addition, at the end of "The Last Instructions," Marvell once again invokes the *ut picture poesis* tradition as he recalls Simonides' statement about painting being a form of "mute poetry, poetry a speaking picture"<sup>7</sup> and asserts the interactive nature of these arts: "How well our arts agree!/Poetic picture, painted poetry" (943–4). And it is within this shaping context that Marvell deploys the *ut pictura poesis* tradition to expose the fissures within a political order whose representational practices suppress a corrupt political reality beneath the ideological fantasy of an heroic, idealized English state. By dramatizing the debate between painting and poetry, Marvell situates the intimate interweaving's of politics and sexual relations within a defining framework of artistic concern, as he tries to develop a satiric method, and a collaborative, open-ended mode of artistic agency, that is equal to the task of describing the debased conditions of the Stuart political world. So instead of being a vehicle for the articulation of cultural ideals and heroic aspirations, Marvell reconceives the conceit of *ut pictura poesis* and invests it with a new, transgressive energy, which, in being underwritten by a language of the body, is able to open up a contestatory imaginative space from which to transform patriarchal understandings of power and agency.

<sup>3</sup> Annabel Patterson, *Marvell and the Civic Crown* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 124, 134.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 128, 137.

<sup>6</sup> All citations of Marvell's verse derive from Andrew Marvell, *The Poems of Andrew Marvell: Revised Edition*, ed. Nigel Smith (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007). Line numbers will appear in parentheses.

<sup>7</sup> Patterson, 127.

In many ways, Marvell anticipates the philosophical preoccupations of modern vitalism. This modern philosophy of vitalism is rooted in a seventeenth-century vitalism whose egalitarian ideals it subsumes and redirects. John Rogers describes seventeenth-century vitalism as holding "in its tamest manifestation the inseparability of body and soul and, in its boldest, the infusion of all material substance with the power of reason and self-motion."<sup>8</sup> And it is in its boldest version that some of this philosophy's more radical political implications begin to emerge: "Energy or spirit, no longer immaterial, is seen as immanent within bodily matter, and even nonorganic matter at least for some vitalists, is thought to contain within it the agents of motion and change."<sup>9</sup> According to Rogers, the midcentury "Vitalist Moment" and its speculations regarding matter and change contributed to "new theorizations of agency and organization" which proved attractive to "politically minded radicals seeking a liberatory conception of individual political agency."<sup>10</sup> As Rogers further states, instead of the mechanistic philosophy of Hobbes or the determinist theology of Calvinist Puritans, both of which insisted on "external agency and centralized organization," vitalism offered a "discourse of self-motion" which foreshadowed the tenets of modern day liberalism.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, by attributing a "divine spirit" to specific bodies and natural elements vitalist inquiry guaranteed "on the level of natural philosophy the possibility of the harmonious interaction among the self-reliant, virtuous, and rational individuals in the decentralized systems of the polity."<sup>12</sup> In this way, vitalism was able to challenge authoritarian structures of power and provide a "theoretical justification for the more collective mode of political agency and the more inclusive vision of political organization that were among the unquestionable products of the English Revolution."<sup>13</sup> Thus, seventeenth-century vitalism, by calling into question traditional forms of agency and organization, may have given Marvell

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<sup>8</sup> John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 1–2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 12.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

the opportunity to conceive of more complex models of agency and challenge the rigidities of conventional gender and political hierarchies.

Although modern philosophies of vitalism pick up on the egalitarian implications of seventeenth-century vitalists, they reorient the earlier vitalism's emphasis on anthropocentric forms of agency by displacing the focus on the human will with a new attention to the capacity for change inherent in the materiality of the nonhuman realm. A leading proponent of a relational version of the modern philosophy of vitalism, Jane Bennett describes a new distributive idea of agency in which human and nonhuman materialities are "inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations" so that "agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces."<sup>14</sup> In this way, Bennett reimagines humans as not only composed of a myriad of vital materialities themselves, a "heterogeneous compound of wonderfully vibrant, dangerously vibrant matter," but also views humans as enmeshed in a dynamic relation with nonhuman bodies and objects which, being "lively and self-organizing," come to possess the status of actants.<sup>15</sup> This entangling of traditionally discrete realms entails a reconception of political, including satiric, efficacy, which, in not being centered on the sovereignty of the human will, creates a space where Marvell renegotiates the compound, ever-shifting nature of political power and human agency. In other words, Bennett seems to be recommending a wholesale reevaluation of the human subject and its orientations as a way of effecting a radical change in perception that will allow us to inspect the mingling of human and nonhuman materialities, as well as encourage human beings to adopt a more restrained, collaborative, open attitude toward a nonhuman nature with its own creative agency. A materialist, vitalist satire, then, must be able to imagine reformed alternatives, as opposed to simply relying on the conventional (and essentially conservative) authority of the satiric voice for its political power. To reform it must be able to do more than ridicule.

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<sup>14</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 13, 21.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 12–13, 10.

Marvell is extremely sensitive to the oppressive vicissitudes of patriarchal authority and intentionally employs a language of the body in "The Last Instructions to a Painter" to critique the intersecting web of political and sexual relations informing the Stuart court. His attempt to hold up for inspection what Hirst and Zwicker term "the deep structures of early modern ideology"<sup>16</sup> is immediately apparent when he provides a resonant entangling of political and material bodies in the portrait of Lady State. Initially, the painting of Lady State functions as an idealized image of post-Restoration Stuart governance, rendering the traditional body politic as harmonious, stable, and feminine. This ideologically constructed image of English statehood under the guidance of Charles II uses a representation of the female body to erase contradictions that might call into question the efficacy of Stuart rule and defuse anxieties regarding the moral stature of the king and his court. However, the new mode of satire Marvell is developing interrupts and exposes the inconsistencies inherent in these Stuart representations of the female body, and by insisting on the noncoincidence of sign and referent underlines the fissures within the idealizations of Stuart discourse.

In addition, Marvell further complicates the totalizing fantasies of Stuart ideology when he directs our attention toward the unfinished and perhaps unfinishable nature of the painting of Lady State: "But ere thou fall'st to work, first painter see/It ben't too slight grown, or too hard for thee" (3–4). While the lines work on a couple of different levels in terms of ideas of decorum and representational practice, ultimately they continue the process whereby Marvell opens up the ideologically inflected portrait of Lady State to contestatory counterclaims that expose the inconsistencies inherent in that ideology. The poem then descends into the realm of the sexual and grotesque with phrases like "great debauch" and "prodigious tools."<sup>17</sup> With these poetic moves, Marvell underlines the very unheroic nature of Stuart governance and begins to render visible the corruption and degradation inhabiting Charles II's court through a language of sexual difference with its depictions

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<sup>16</sup> Hirst and Zwicker, 150.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, 369.

of a grotesque and anarchically excessive corporeality. This body-as-excess trope functions as a mode of critique in that images of out-of-control bodies, bodies that do not align with the harmonizing contours of Stuart ideology, complicate notions of political intentionality and, by locating these intentions within larger networks of human/nonhuman materialities, create a space in which the boundaries and capacities of political agency—including the agency of the satirist—must be renegotiated. Supplementing this materialistic critique of Stuart politics is an examination of the capacities of poetic or pictorial art to adequately represent the English body politic that has not just been shorn of its high-minded ideals, but also revealed to be in a state of moral and political disrepair. Marvell considers the limitations of these two modes of representation when he asks "Canst thou paint without colours?" (5) or inquires "canst thou daub a signpost, and that ill?" (7). While such questions summon up doubts, also prevalent in the *ut pictura poesis* tradition, in regards to the representational efficacy of painting, they may also be intended to signify the sort of artistic struggle Marvell experiences as he tries to develop a polyvocal satiric style that is appropriate for depicting the corrupt and intensely unheroic world of Stuart politics, a world that in some ways satirizes itself.

The next line, "But if to match our crimes thy skill presumes" (13), reiterates Marvell's search for a new sort of artistic language and suggests the need for a lower form of decorum since the poem's theme, the moral debasement and misgovernance of the Stuart court, requires a correspondingly low, de-idealizing style. The poem enigmatically answers this question of decorum with "As the Indians, draw our luxury in plumes" (14), a phrase which echoes an earlier Marvell poem, "Upon Appleton House," and its reference to feather paintings in pre-Conquest Mexico.<sup>18</sup> Through this allusion Marvell contextualizes the reference to "Indians" by juxtaposing it to the poet-narrator's retreat to the wood at Nun Appleton and his self-description as the "great prelate of the grove" (592) one who is able to communicate with the natural world in a pre-lapsarian language he calls "their most learned original" (570). Diane McColley views this easy interchange between the human world and nonhuman

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 234.

nature as a moment of "mutual perception" in which Marvell recognizes "a seeing, knowing, feeling world of other species responsive to us."<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, McColley suggests the destructive impact of feather paintings on nature: "The ornamental and commercial use of hummingbirds' brilliant plumes nearly extinguished them."<sup>20</sup> In both these comments, McColley recommends a reorientation of human relations with nature so that instead of seeking to dominate and objectify the natural world humans should pursue a more reciprocal relationship, one which will lead to a recognition of nature's energy, vitality, and subject status. By virtue of this act of poetic echoing, Marvell draws attention to the fact that words and their meanings are not transparent, but rather immersed in a complex web of signification. In addition, the poetic entangling of feather paintings within a context of human/nonhuman relations gestures toward an analogous enmeshing of human intentionality, in both its artistic and political guises, within what Diana Coole, another modern vitalist, calls a "dense field traversed by multiple perspectives that subtend and emanate from manifold points."<sup>21</sup>

Marvell also compares the merits of empiricism to chance and considers how each category might offer different perceptual and linguistic possibilities for poet or painter. By referring to Robert Hooke, Marvell self-consciously summons up the world of natural philosophers and suggests how discoveries such as the microscope open up new ways of perceiving the world, based on a method of scientific inquiry, which he holds in tension with poetic or painterly modes of perception. Joanna Picciotto asserts that the microscope and telescope provided superior perceptual models for the early modern era since they offered a more detached, objective, and therefore more accurate way of seeing that poetry and painting were unable to duplicate.<sup>22</sup> However, Karen Barad complicates the notion of an objectivity articulated in terms of a masterful humanistic scientific observer and a passive, inert observed material

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<sup>19</sup> Diane McColley, *Poetry and Ecology in the Age of Milton and Marvell*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 34.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>21</sup> Diana Coole, "The Inertia of Matter and the Generativity of Flesh," in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 111.

<sup>22</sup> Joanna Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 344–5.

or natural realm when she states that "the knower does not stand in a relation of absolute externality to the natural world—there is no such exterior observational point."<sup>23</sup> While Barad does not dismiss the value of objectivity, she does redefine its parameters so that the protocols of scientific investigation do not simply reproduce asymmetrical power relations and unreflectively exalt a masculinist scientific subject who invests the universe with his superior forms of knowledge. Rather, Barad prefers to situate what she calls human "practices of knowing" in an ongoing and dynamic relation with nonhuman entities, and states that if "observational interventions, concepts, and other human practices have a role to play, it is as part of the material configuration of the world in its intra-active becoming."<sup>24</sup>

The juxtaposition of Marvell's delineation of scientific optics with his description of the role of chance in terms of artistic production does not assert the superiority of one form of knowledge over another as much as it suggests how multiple and intersecting cultural discourses undergird and help to condition the poet's and the painter's artistic choices. Emphasizing the painter's movement from intense frustration to an inadvertent aesthetic satisfaction, the final minidrama of the opening section depicts the artist who, unable to finish the painting of "his hound" (22), in a spasm of rage throws his sponge at the canvas and by chance perfects his picture. According to Patterson, Marvell draws this story from a classical source that had been used to emphasize the self-control of the artist Protogenes, whereas the Marvellian version of the story focuses on the excessive anger of the painter and how the accidental takes precedence over the intentional.<sup>25</sup> However, hovering as it does between classical anecdote and contemporary adaptation, between competing, antithetical interpretive responses, this scene crystallizes Marvell's efforts to redefine the agency of painter and poet, not as some kind of univocal act of artistic mastery, but rather as something that is multiple, open-ended, and always subject to change. Marvell locates his painter, and by extension his own poetic creativity, within a differential

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<sup>23</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 184.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>25</sup> Patterson, 161.

grid of constraints and possibilities, an embedding of the artist in Barad's world of intra-active becoming in which the mirroring of the smiling artist by the grinning dog opens up into a shared world of agential possibility, and in which the interaction between human and animal suggests the entangling of the human with a vibrant natural world. Here Marvell seems to commit himself to a poetics of openness and ambiguity, conceptualizing artistic activity as a series of alternatives to, rather than an unquestioning affirmation of or an explicit condemnation of, a repressive and corrupt Stuart political ideology. Thus, at the beginning of the poem, Marvell's mock heroic pursuit of decorum, as well as his theatricalized debate regarding the efficacy of poetry and painting, become ways for him to articulate and foreground a more nuanced form of agency that uses human/nonhuman corporeality to critique of idealizing modes of Charles II's court.

Following this introduction, Marvell lays out three successive portraits which depict the debauched and degraded status of three aristocrats: Henry Jermyn, the Duchess of York, and the Countess of Castlemaine. According to Zwicker, the attacks on these personages are "not simply the physical excesses of individuals but the political deformity of the body politic, and one is insistently a metaphor of the other."<sup>26</sup> The description of Jermyn initiates the perverse reciprocity between what Zwicker terms "sexual defilement and political corruption."<sup>27</sup> The sexualized portrait of Jermyn (he is described as a "stallion" [30] for instance) oscillates uncomfortably between the debased notion of "gold" (29) as avarice in the opening line of the description and the invocation of the Golden Age in the penultimate "When men and women took each other's word" (48). In a sense, Jermyn, imprisoned as he is in the corrupt, fallen language of the present and yet yearning for the reassuringly transparent significations of a prelapsarian world, exemplifies not only an unrealizable linguistic nostalgia, but also a kind of moral deracination that registers itself as a continuous play of signifiers across a seemingly endless proliferation of sexualized images of the body. This intersection of language and the body is at once sterile and productive: sterile by

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<sup>26</sup> Zwicker, *Lines of Authority*, 110–11.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

virtue of the fact that it reveals the moral vacuum at the heart of the body politic and productive in the sense that, by acknowledging the interdependence of the cultural and the material, it tentatively suggests a potential renewal of politics and language through the poem's various iterations of the body. The portrait of the Duchess of York emphasizes the moral depravity and misgovernance that characterizes Stuart rule through its graphic representations of sexual desire that call into question the "promise of pleasure and abundance that had proclaimed the sexual restoration of the court."<sup>28</sup> However, what is even more intriguing is the way that Marvell uses the Duchess's portrait to deploy a language of sexual difference that, in being anchored in representations of the female body, enables him to articulate a complex form of female power. Although the depiction of the Duchess as a witch exercising "forbidden arts" over elements of the natural world ("moon," "stars," "elms," and "fawns") establishes the conventional link between the feminine and nature, it also suggests, foreshadowing as it does the body of the king at the end of the poem, that, instead of being external to cultural authority, the Duchess's power already exists within the ideological structures shaping Stuart versions of the body politic.

The final portrait of the Countess of Castlemaine, even as it continues the sexualized rhetoric and corporeal emphasis featured in the delineations of Jermyn and the Duchess, also queries whether or not demystification of the political world and its univocal forms of thought is even possible. Just as the figure of Lady State embodies the totalizing ethos of a Stuart ideology that would preclude engagement with issues of misgovernance and corruption, so the imaginative acts of the poet or painter may be complicit in the production of the ideological configurations that would substitute sameness for difference. And it is the classical story of Apelles, the court painter for Alexander, and his love for Campaspe that images this poetic complicity: "Ah, painter, now could Alexander live,/And this Campaspe thee, Apelles, give!" (103–4). The intimation here of a potential sexual relationship between the poet/painter and the Countess of Castlemaine becomes a metaphor for the way in which a painter may be seduced by his own work of art as he "falls in love with the sins he describes, aiding

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 111.

and abetting the crimes of the court."<sup>29</sup> These final lines of the Castlemaine portrait register the correspondences between political and poetic acts of seduction and suggest how works of art, as well as political ideologies, may enchant and mystify their audiences. Marvell's self-conscious intertwining of sexual and imaginative fulfillment with politic ideology suggests how painter and poet, and more specifically the satirist, must resist the temptation to aestheticize structures of power, and thereby grant them a captivating coherence that they do not actually possess. Marvell is cognizant of how his own satire might have the capacity to mystify and enchant and builds into his satiric vision an insistent self-reflexivity that functions as a distancing mechanism and prevents his audience from submitting to the aestheticizing power of his own satiric art. Thus, this brief passage, which depicts how easily the poet/painter may be assimilated to a politics of narcissistic self-display, provides an effective transition to the next section of narrative where Marvell describes the "monster" Excise (131) in grotesquely feminine terms. Like the depiction of the Duchess of York as a witch, this passage demonizes Excise as an insatiably appetitive figure who, with her "hundred rows of teeth the shark exceeds" (135) and "swallows all down her indented maw" (138). On one level, this description of Excise functions as a symbol of the rapacity of England's ruling class and critiques the ways in which the king, his inner circle of advisers known as the Cabal, and Parliament unscrupulously wield the power they have been given by the state. However, on another level, the passage also safely contains that critique within a trope of devouring femininity that implicitly defines that abuse of power as aberrant, outside of cultural norms, and, thus, far distant from the operations of true patriarchal authority.

This double move seems to suggest a conflicted Marvell, a poet simultaneously committed to challenging and redeeming patriarchal imperatives, and one who knows how to expertly manipulate the language of sexual difference to convey his own ambivalence towards male authority. In discussing *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, Hirst and Zwicker comment on the yearning quality of Marvell's verse and "how programmatic and how intimate in this poet is the need to attach and idealize with the

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<sup>29</sup> Smith, 372.

impulse to challenge, to slander, to subvert."<sup>30</sup> What distinguishes the description of Excise as an example of Marvellian yearning is the fact that it anatomizes the complex ways in which representations of gender and sexuality work to shape and critique ideological structures in Restoration England. Politically, the distancing of patriarchal power from a wayward and destructive Excise, whose image links the feminine to the natural world of "shark" (135), "cassowar" (136), and "bats" (140), serves to conceal how categories of the feminine and nature help to shore up and consolidate patriarchal identity. But, Marvell also perhaps wants to claim that the conventional link between femininity and nature embodied by the figure of Excise has a vitality and energy of its own that refuses to submit to the control of restrictive structures of masculine power. The sheer excess and descriptive exuberance of Excise argues for a different kind of relationship between the traditional dualisms of culture/nature and masculine/feminine, one that gestures towards a type of agency defined by dynamic, reciprocal interactions between these traditionally discrete categories. Thus, Excise becomes a more complicated figure than her initial appearance would indicate, since she comes to exemplify the human will to political mastery and at same time helps to reveal the limits of anthropocentric versions of agency and self-conscious reform.

On a poetic level, Marvell's allusions to the allegory of Sin and Death in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* add another layer of complexity to the description of Excise. References to the violently unnatural birth of Excise "Frighted the midwife and the mother tore" (132) and "Bugged in incest with the mongrel beast" (146) invoke the birth of Death and the rape of Sin by her offspring.<sup>31</sup> Marvell joins the sexual violence of this Miltonic scene to the self-regard of a Satan who does not recognize Sin or Death, members of his own twisted genealogy, and who, having given birth to Sin, becomes sexually attracted to her: "who full oft/Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing/Becam'st enamor'd, and such joy thou took'st/With me in secret, that my

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<sup>30</sup> Hirst and Zwicker, 70.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, 373.

womb conceiv'd/A growing burden" (2.763–7).<sup>32</sup> What is notable in these lines is the representation of a Satanic form of generativity in which Satan at first "averse" (2.763) to his creation gradually becomes "enamored" (2.765) of her because he sees Sin as simply an extension or mirror image of himself. For Victoria Kahn, the allegory of Sin and Death articulates a kind of imaginative narcissism, "a form of interpretation, and self-reflection, which precludes genuine engagement with the text or the external world because it presupposes the signified from the outset."<sup>33</sup> From this perspective, Satan's generative activities are sterile since he reproduces only forms of himself. He also labors under the delusion of his own self-determination when, in fact, his preemptive interpretation of signs suggests that his thought and actions are predetermined. Marvell self-consciously deploys this Miltonic intertext in his description of Excise in order to render visible the destructive narcissism underpinning Stuart political ideology, as well as to urge the poet/painter to adopt a certain self-reflexivity that will enable him to have a genuine encounter with the world rather than engaging in sterile acts of self-replication.

In her study of the erotics of vitalism, Leah Marcus describes an "Adamic symbiosis between the speaker and his environment based on mutual perception and sympathy" and I think that this form of human/nonhuman reciprocity is the vitalist ideal that Marvell translates to his own artistic practice through this ironic invocation of Milton's Sin and Death.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Marvell suggests how the poet or painter is embedded in a field of human/nonhuman relations and must distance himself from monarchical and literary forms of absolutism in order to avoid a sort of artistic death. These acts of resistance on the part of the poet not only intimate the insufficiency of absolutist systems of power, but also render visible larger vitalist networks of human/nonhuman materialities and suggest the potency of these networks by

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<sup>32</sup> All citations of Milton's verse derive from John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merrit Y. Hughes (New York: Macmillan, 1957; Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003). Book and line numbers will appear in parentheses.

<sup>33</sup> Victoria Kahn, "Allegory and the Sublime in *Paradise Lost*," in *John Milton*, ed. Annabel Patterson (New York: Longman, 1992), 191.

<sup>34</sup> Leah Marcus, "Marvell's 'Nymph Complaining' and the Erotics of Vitalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Martin Dzelzainis and Edward Holberton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 378.

underscoring the constraints they impose on absolutist forms of political agency. Finally, the poet or painter has to actively commit himself to the transformative energies of a satire underwritten by a vital, creative language of the body that has the capacity to enlarge, if not regenerate, both political and artistic perspectives.

The grotesque image of Excise, styled as "this new whore of state" (150), transposes its aesthetics of narcissism to the realm of the political in order to focus attention on the factionalism and reckless selfishness that shape the Parliamentary debate over taxation. The mock heroic attributes of this debate depict the corrosive effects of misgovernance on England as a nation, while its implicit comparison of the morally dubious figure of Excise with the falsely idealizing construct of Lady State at the beginning of the poem suggests the fallen nature of Stuart politics. In a sense, Marvell's representation of Parliament's aggressively partisan nature, its chaotic descent into a politics of self-interest, summons up the specter of heroic epic, its catalogues and glorious battles, but then dispels the possibility of heroic action in a morally depleted and unheroic present. Instead of aspiring towards a healthy, vibrant body politic, Parliament organizes itself around the figure of Excise and actively contributes to a version of the body politic that is blatantly corrupt and composed of "Gross bodies, grosser minds, and grossest cheats" (179). Although the ascending rhythm of this line suggests that some kind of growth or transformation is taking place, the actual movement of the line from corrupt bodies to moral degradation suggests an inability to move forward, a moral stasis or vacuum which precludes the possibility of political renewal or moral reform. And presiding over this scene of anarchic and nonproductive patriarchal power is Clarendon, Charles II's chancellor, who, now ironically renewed and magically cured of his gout, becomes not a figure of positive transformation but one whose poisonous relationship to Parliament ("What frosts to fruit, what arsenic to the rat" [341]) betokens an almost apocalyptic destructive force and seems to offer up a vision of future annihilation in place of the promise of national renovation: "So, at the sun's recess, again returns/The comet dread, and earth and heaven burns" (347–8). Interestingly, Marvell's darkly ironic portrait of Clarendon depends upon an analogy which features the healing, reparative powers of Medea, and which, as it recalls the witch-like powers ascribed to the Duchess

of York in an earlier portrait, emphasizes the entangling of the masculine and the feminine, the human with the natural world in an effort to suggest the complexity of political agency and the delusive nature of patriarchal assertions of autonomy.

Marvell ends this poetic unit with a detailed account of the Skimmington ride, whose punishment of a rebellious, disobedient wife manifests the defensiveness of self-validating patriarchal regimes. The inversion of gender hierarchy that occasions the ride, with the wife exercising unnatural power over her husband—"Where, when the brawny female disobeys/And beats the husband till for peace he prays" (379–80)—becomes an emblem of a Restoration political world consumed by greed and unbridled ambition and ignorant of civic virtue and public order. In this context, the Skimmington ride becomes a kind of street theater which in performing the threatening spectacle of female power attempts to police and reinstall conventional gender boundaries. In addition, by means of this "spectacle innocent" (389) intended to instruct the youthful citizenry in the proper conduct of its domestic affairs, Marvell also offers an ironic commentary on the thwarting of English political agency in international affairs, as Holland becomes the authority-wielding wife and England, which should be the one in control, the fearful, submissive husband.<sup>35</sup> However, although the Skimmington's reversals of gender appear to ultimately affirm patriarchal imperatives, the very existence of the ride suggests the fragile and deeply unstable nature of a masculinity that requires the repeated performance of its social prerogatives to maintain its power. In this scenario, satire cannot ever achieve the reforms it claims to want, because its chief aim is to reperform its own authoritative response to moral depravity. So the ostensible retrenchment of male authority depicted in this passage registers a deeply felt anxiety or uneasiness regarding the permeability of the borders by which male authority defines and supports itself. It is almost as if Marvell is stating that even if patriarchal power assumes multiple forms, these forms resemble each other in the sense that all of them rely for their legitimacy on repressive constructions of femininity, whether passive and tractable or ostensibly threatening, as in the case of the Skimmington ride.

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<sup>35</sup> Smith, 380.

Further complicating these lines is the analogy between the shaming effects of the Skimmington ride and the desire of the poet or painter to ridicule and thereby restrain or correct the behavior of his subject: "So thou and I, dear painter, represent/In quick effigy, other's faults, and feign/By making them ridiculous, to restrain" (390–2). These lines once again invoke the *ut pictura poesis* tradition, intimating as they do the equivalence and complementarity of painting and poetry and suggesting their cross-fertilization. In addition, they also clearly assert the interdependence of aesthetics and politics, and in so doing once again raise the issue of complicity or resistance in terms of the artist's stance towards the abuses he depicts. While on the surface the poet or painter seems to be merely reaffirming traditional structures of masculinity, the anxiety that marks the Skimmington ride also transfers to the poet/painter who nervously rehearses the simultaneous exaltation and undermining of masculine authority. Commenting on the satiric character of "The Last Instructions," Warren Chernaik states that Marvell exhibits a lack of "imaginative control" in which "the forces of disorder, once called forth, may appear to swamp the artist's ordering imagination."<sup>36</sup> However, the forces of disorder do not merely overwhelm the artist. Although he does depict the overwhelming nature of the moral chaos inundating Parliament, Marvell nonetheless self-consciously employs a rhetoric of corporeality that anchors the artist in the material realities of the historical present but also enables him to maintain a critical distance from his subject. The ineluctable nature of the body, the very density of its signifying networks as well as its shifting configurations, suggests the complex and fluid nature of artistic agency associated with the poet and the painter. What Marvell may be trying to communicate is that while the artist participates in and partially submits to the powerful motions of historical process, he is also able, through acts of satiric negation, to distance himself from history and its contemporary ideological embodiments and establish a form of artistic agency that is able to see beyond these limiting constraints. For although Marvell, as a poet, is inextricably implicated in the intricate web of political events,

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<sup>36</sup> Warren Chernaik, *The Poet's Time: Politics and Religion in the Work of Andrew Marvell*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 200–1.

he is also capable of presenting alternatives to the debased social and political reality of his time, by virtue of the imaginative space provided by a satiric mode that expands the scope of agentic possibility to include a teeming, dynamic natural world.

In the next section of the poem, Marvell moves from the negative depictions of Stuart court culture and Parliamentary politics to the more positive pastoral mode that, in its depictions of the Dutch Admiral De Ruyter, suggests the possibility of the recovery of heroic masculine agency. Through his representations of De Ruyter, Marvell is implicitly questioning not whether poet or painter is better at depicting heroic action, as in the *ut pictura poesis* tradition, but whether any artist, including himself, is able to authentically describe heroic activity in so debased a culture as England has become. In some sense, Marvell may be holding up the heroic nature of De Ruyter for readerly inspection in order to encourage a certain level of self-reflexivity that, in helping his audience to recognize the necessity of reconstituting English values, might lead to a reevaluation of political commitments and the rebuilding of a national heroic character. Judith Haber emphasizes the "self-reflexive," "self-correcting," and paradoxical characteristics of the pastoral mode, in linking the pastorals of Marvell with the classical tradition, specifically the *Idylls* of Theocritus.<sup>37</sup> According to Haber, Theocritus sees the relationship of the bucolic and pastoral as complex, suggesting the distance of pastoral from the epic genre and the heroic ideals it sponsors while at the same time making the contradictory assertion that these heroic ideals can still be enacted within the pastoral mode.<sup>38</sup> In this way, Theocritean pastoral becomes a vehicle by which Marvell can express his own mixture of despair and tentative optimism in regard to Restoration politics. Specifically, he converts the genre of pastoral into a vitalist mode of redemption in which it is a vibrant, active natural world that recuperates heroic agency for a depleted, unheroic present.

For example, in "The Last Instructions," Marvell picks up on the paradoxical relation between the bucolic and the heroic in the passage describing De Ruyter's

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<sup>37</sup> Judith Haber, *Pastoral and the Poetics of Self-Contradiction: Theocritus to Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 11.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

journey up the Thames and his defeat of the English fleet. Chernaik views this scene as essentially mock-heroic and comments on the voyeuristic elements of the passage, in which De Ruyter becomes the object of an erotic gaze that implicates the reader in "a degree of guilty pleasure in looking on."<sup>39</sup> Zwicker notes the contrast with the earlier unheroic portraits of dissolute aristocrats and corrupt Parliamentary practices, and remarks on the elevating nature of Marvell's pastoral description of De Ruyter's invasion: "What might properly be figured as violence and plunder, rape and violation, is magically transformed into a pastoral of gallant love."<sup>40</sup> On one level, De Ruyter's vision of "the crystal streams and banks so green" (525) and the "fresh blood, fresh delight" (532) that swell his veins at the sight of the "bashful nymphs" (527) does seem to enact Zwicker's "pastoral of gallant love" and contribute to a synthesis of the pastoral and the heroic. However, on another level, Marvell displaces this romance fantasy with a vitalist account of the natural world whose teeming, vibrant energies imaged in streams, banks, and nymphs transforms and sexually reinvigorates De Ruyter. So instead of being a way to gloss over the violence of this scene, the transformative energies of the nonhuman, inhering in the material objects and bodies of the natural world, suggest the limits of masculine agency, while at the same time indicating how heroic action may still be recoverable even though it seems part of a remote epic tradition. In addition, De Ruyter's recovery of youthful potency, as well as the sexual yearning displayed in the image of the "wanton boys" (542) clinging to the ropes of the Dutch ships amidst this pastoral splendor, presents the reader with an erotically charged and physically embodied version of heroism. And it is through this imagery of transitory sexual desire that the passage manages to project a sense of the short-lived nature of heroic action in a distinctively bleak, ignoble contemporary world, while at the same time asserting a hopeful continuity with the lost heroism of a distant past that may still emerge and flourish despite the inhospitable conditions of Stuart England.

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<sup>39</sup> Warren Chernaik, "Harsh Remedies: Satire and Politics in 'Last Instructions to a Painter,'" in *The Oxford Handbook of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Martin Dzelzainis and Edward Holberton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 456.

<sup>40</sup> Zwicker, *Lines of Authority*, 113.

Although Nigel Smith claims that De Ruyter "succumbs to sexual appetite not far removed from the English courtiers,"<sup>41</sup> I think De Ruyter keeps his pastoral virtue intact and it is not until the Dutch bombard Sheerness that the tone becomes sharply satiric. For in this scene's generic mixing of pastoral and epic values, De Ruyter's resurgent physicality, tinged as it is by pastoral innocence, points towards a reinvigorated national community animated by heroic aspiration. Marvell intends for his readers to view the figure of De Ruyter as genuinely virtuous in this passage so that they may poetically experience the nature of the heroic and reorient their imaginations to the possibility that heroism is still a viable alternative within the debased world of the Stuarts. In addition, the fact that these lines foreground Dutch heroic activity rather than English, registers the political losses and imaginative failures of seventeenth-century England and suggests just how far the English have to go in recovering their lost heroic identity. Perhaps the fact that Marvell situates his portrait of pastoral heroism in terms of an ironic contrast between Dutch heroism and English cowardice suggests that he rejects the masculinist myths of epic glory. However, Marvell does use the heroic potency of De Ruyter to expose the enervation of Stuart political culture. He does this by invoking the nonhuman realm in his delineations of the Royal Navy, describing the English ships as sick "Like moulting fowl, a weak and easy prey" (574) whose former dominion over the seas has been humiliatingly relegated to a distant past: "The conscious stag so, once the forest's dread,/Flies to the wood and hides his armless head" (579–80). To complement and further these images of military impotence, Marvell compares Monck's shame and mental distress at witnessing the Dutch seizure of the *Royal Charles*, one of the foremost ships in the English fleet, to that of a tigress whose cubs have been stolen:

After the robbers for her whelps doth yell;  
But sees enraged the river flow between,  
Frustrate revenge and love, by loss more keen,  
At her own breast her useless claws does arm:  
She tears herself, since him she cannot harm. (624–8)

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<sup>41</sup> Smith, 366.

In each of these instances, the nonhuman, in the form of the moulting bird, fleeing stag, and helpless tigress, registers the sense of shame and futility experienced by the English due to their defeat at the hands of the Dutch. It is almost as if this transference of shameful affect from the human to the nonhuman functions as a refusal of cultural self-knowledge and a desire on the part of the English to project their failure and incompetence onto a natural world that is still subject to their dominion. However, over and above this enactment of willful blindness, Marvell may also be suggesting the inadequacy and potentially damaging consequences of human-centered versions of agency. He also implies that the English defeat in the Anglo-Dutch war entails a conceptual shift to a more comprehensive definition of agential possibilities that might explain England's lack of control over such historical events.

This complication of agency continues with the heroic martyrdom of Archibald Douglas and the various human/nonhuman materialities and bodies that it invokes. Though echoing the heroic achievement of De Ruyter, the heroism of Douglas is of a different order, a complex and resonant amalgam of classical allusion, sexual ambiguity, and nationalism. Douglas's refusal to surrender to the Dutch and his death on his ship, *Royal Oak*, has a Virgilian intertext in the story of the deaths of Nisus and Euryalus in Book 9 of the *Aeneid*. As Smith notes, Virgil uses "ardor" in the question Nisus poses to Euryalus prior to their doomed heroic action: "do the gods light this fire in our hearts/or does each man's desire become his god?"<sup>42</sup> This question goes unanswered while Nisus contemplates "some great exploit," but it hovers over the tragic action of the plot and forces the reader to consider whether the desire for glory has a divine origin or is merely a human construct operating as a delusive idol. So even though Virgil movingly describes the friendship of Nisus and Euryalus, and memorializes the pathos of their ending for the consideration of future generations, he also seems to be questioning the value of the heroic ethos, especially if it is rooted in vain human imaginings that recklessly demand the deaths of young men. Similarly, although Marvell celebrates Douglas's heroic sacrifice, he may also want to explore the originary motivations for such heroic acts and how they might "rewrite

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 387: "dine hinc ardorem mentibus addunt,/Euryale, an sua cuique deus fit dira cupido?"; Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Viking, 2006), bk. 9, ll. 219–20.

the default grammar of agency, a grammar that assigns activity to people and passivity to things."<sup>43</sup> For Douglas's heroic martyrdom is a strange mixture of the active and the passive, which initially features the chaste body actively distancing itself from "envious virgins" (652) in a sort of invincible self-love of narcissistic detachment: "His yellow locks curl back themselves to seek,/Nor other courtship knew but to his cheek" (653–4). So instead of the strong male bond between Nisus and Euryalus, Douglas is isolated, suspended between the human and nonhuman worlds as he swims through rustling reeds dodging nymphs. This seems to be the antithesis of what Marcus terms a "vitalist immersion in landscape" where the boundaries dissolve between the human, animal, and vegetative realms.<sup>44</sup> But here, the act of martyrdom does not so much preclude this immersion in landscape as it displaces it onto the fusion of flame and body that produces the Douglas's death.

It is, therefore, on the level of the burning martyred body of Douglas that Marvell critiques the corruption of Charles and his court but also offers an alternative to their dissolute lifestyle. And I think the fact that Douglas's heroic sacrifice is almost superhuman suggests how debased and fractured the body politic is at this time and how far Marvell has to go to engender a transformation of political values. To this end, he stages an erotic encounter between the flames and Douglas's body ("Like a glad lover, the fierce flames he meets,/And tries his first embraces in their sheets" [677–8]) and characterizes the literal melting away of Douglas's physical existence ("...He felt/His altering form and soldered limbs to melt" [685–6]) in the gentlest of terms as a warming of the self and then a going to bed. These two very different bodily sensations resemble each other in being elemental and intimate facets of the human condition. In fact, these seemingly contradictory encounters with death, the one violent and the other quietly accepting, figure forth transitional moments of merging, soul/afterlife and waking/sleeping, that provide powerful images of connection and unity. In some ways, Douglas's immolated body not only signifies a fiery purification of the national psyche, but also functions as a genuinely unifying image

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<sup>43</sup> Bennett, 121.

<sup>44</sup> Marcus, 379.

of the body politic, underwritten by selfless civic values, one that has the ability to supplant the cynically idealized version of Lady State used by the Stuarts to conceal their own greed and corruption beneath a false sense of abundance and prosperity. But, while Douglas's act of martyrdom does not guarantee a restoration of a battered national psyche, it does splice together Christian and epic versions of heroism that underwrite the value of heroic agency and suggest how the vital materiality of Archibald Douglas's body might sponsor a rejuvenation of the national character. In addition, Douglas's sacrifice, caught as it is between the passivity of pastoral and the agential acts of satire, obliquely articulates the limits and possibilities of satire as a genre, and also underlines Marvell's satiric practice: a complex entangling of the active and the passive, at once critical of and yet dependent upon Stuart ideology for its artistic groundwork.

Finally, the androgynous beauty of Douglas with its implications of physical and spiritual chastity occupies a liminal space in the satire as it glances back at the lascivious portraits of the debased aristocrats of the Stuart court depicted earlier and looks ahead to the lecherous impulses of the king represented at the end of the poem. The description of the virtuous Douglas contrasts with the corruption, both sexual and political, of the king and his court, but also intimates that the image of Douglas may be able to subsume and redirect the misguided energies of these political agents. In a sense, Douglas's martyrdom is the poetic climax of the satire, operating as it does to reorient affective expectations of readers away from the disgust and exhaustion they might feel regarding the court and Parliament and towards new more hopeful engagements with the political world made possible by, and imaged in, Douglas's heroism. According to Zwicker, Douglas is "a cynosure of innocence, integrity, and virtue" and his portrait an attempt by Marvell to freeze time, "enclosing in the lapidary perfection of his verse, a moment of physical innocence and moral perfection."<sup>45</sup> However, Douglas's heroic action may also hint at a new more inclusive

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<sup>45</sup> Steven N. Zwicker, "Sites of Instruction: Andrew Marvell and the Tropes of Restoration Portraiture," in *Politics, Transgression, and Representation at the Court of Charles II*, ed. Julia Marciari Alexander and Catharine Macleod (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 132.

grammar of agency in which the complex elements of virtue, the destructive, yet transformative force of the nonhuman flames, and the coexistence of an active seeking out of martyrdom with the passive acceptance of mortality not only dramatize the inexplicable and multilayered nature of human subjectivity, but also frames human intent within "an interstitial field of nonpersonal, ahuman forces, flows, tendencies, and trajectories."<sup>46</sup> For it is the compelling, and ultimately irresolvable, contradictions at the heart of Douglas's sacrifice that enable him to become a fitting emblem of national unification, suggesting as they do the need to appeal to incongruous and divergent sectors of society, as well as the desire to reassemble the fractured and dysfunctional social and political worlds of seventeenth-century England.

The shift from the transformative heroics of Archibald Douglas to the final portrait of the sleeping king's lustful vision of a naked woman signals a return to the sexual license and political corruption of the Stuart court so vividly rendered in the opening portraits of the Duchess of York and her fellow aristocrats. From this circularity of reference arises the despairing recognition that sensuality and vice are the inescapable conditions of an unredeemable political realm. The passage further acknowledges this failure of political agency in the king's inability to recognize the virginal maiden as an allegorical figure of England, a misreading that suggests that "pleasure rather than honor or abundance is the aim of this monarch" and that "urges a recognition that England herself is matter simply to excite and relieve the king's desires."<sup>47</sup> But the fact that the king reaches out but then shrinks back "chilled with her touch so cold" (903) not only intensifies the critique of Charles, but also creates a rhythm of excitement and disappointment that may invoke the political promises and failures of the Restoration. In addition, this passage with its emphasis on the personal and political sterility of the king reestablishes a correspondence between the failure of sexual potency and a lack of political will. So instead of insight and change, the poem offers a constant reenactment of folly and vice appended to the body of the king and its uncontrollable desires, and in so doing makes an implicit call for a more comprehensive form of political agency, one not dependent on a single

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<sup>46</sup> Bennett, 61.

<sup>47</sup> Zwicker, "Sites of Instruction," 133.

human perspective, but rather one that embeds the political actor in an "intercorporeal field" in which there are a multiplicity of perspectives "all jostling together and intersecting to gestate and agitate the dense tissue of relationships that constitute the flesh."<sup>48</sup> And it is this insistent materiality that Marvell's satire presents as a productive evaluative mode and which underwrites the envoy's image of the telescope making manifest hitherto unseen spots on the sun, and by extension the moral and physical imperfections defining the character and body of Charles II. But Marvell plays this failure of political agency off against his own success at developing a satirical mode and vocabulary equal to the demands of his historical moment as it celebrates the efficacy of the poet's and painter's artistic agency: "Painter, adieu! How well our arts agree!/Poetic picture, painted poetry" (943–4). Whereas Annabel Patterson sees this moment as a potential renovation of *ut pictura poesis* and a transcending of satire,<sup>49</sup> I view it as Marvell's celebration of a satiric mode that is simultaneously complicit and distant, capable of holding up social ills for critique, and that in its artful entangling of the human and nonhuman, the ideal and the material, is able to sketch out new transformative forms of political agency.

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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<sup>48</sup> Coole, 106.

<sup>49</sup> Patterson, 165.

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