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REVIEW

Review of Martin Dzelzainis and Edward Holberton, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Andrew Marvell*

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A review of Martin Dzelzainis and Edward Holberton's *The Oxford Handbook of Andrew Marvell*.

Keywords: handbook; literary history; methodology; contemporaries; influence

Martin Dzelzainis and Edward Holberton, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Andrew Marvell*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. 848; Hardback \$175 (£125)

The Oxford Handbook of Andrew Marvell is richly conceived and executed. Its forty-three essays are remarkably varied, if uniformly well researched, developed, and written. Thanks to the contributors and their careful editors, Martin Dzelzainis and Edward Holberton, readers of Marvell will have a far clearer understanding than ever before of Marvell's texts, contexts, aesthetics, life, careers, and legacy. A good number of these essays began as presentations at annual meetings of the Andrew Marvell Society and the Renaissance Society of America and are the fruits of energetic debate and collaboration. That Marvell's oeuvre should elicit such lively conversations in person and on the page is altogether appropriate. The discussion that follows touches only a few points of interest to this reviewer and leaves out altogether essays that are of equal importance and freshness. Readers would do well to put this review aside and take up the book itself post-haste.

Nicholas von Maltzahn's essay offers an excellent overview of a literary life full of ambiguity and seeming contradiction. Marvell's "renunciations of sophistication

are voiced in a most sophisticated verse and prose" (5). (In that, Marvell has much in common with another posthumous poet of the previous generation, George Herbert, among others.) The following essays in the book's first section proceed diachronically, giving the reader a cumulative and textured sense of the writer's life and thought. The book is divided into four sections: Part 1: Marvell and His Times; Part 2: Readings; Part 3: Marvell and His Contemporaries; and Part 4: Marvell's Afterlife.

What do we mean by literary studies? What do we investigate, how, and to what ends? Marvell's sometimes maddening and often exquisite indeterminacies send the writers in search of data and meaning. Can we date Marvell's works? How did he make use of his classical models and humanist education? How did his father's ministry in Hull shape his son's life? How do Marvell's texts make use of or even transform retrospectively his models? What might his works appear to tell us about Marvell's psyche? What were his politics, and how did they evolve? What do his letters—to his nephew, friends and patrons, and to the Hull Corporation as their representative in Parliament—tell us about his temperament and habits of mind, his political and economic allegiances and antipathies? With what circles do his works engage, in what moment in time, why, and to what effect? How do we evaluate hybrid printings and manuscripts that have been compiled by various hands in unclear circumstances and often to unknown or multiple ends? How did Marvell interact with contemporaries, and what is his literary and intellectual legacy? These are some of the questions these essays pursue. This collection will be of interest not only to Marvell scholars, but to those interested in larger issues of literary history and methodology.

One cumulative effect of this volume is to present us with continuities in the life of Marvell's mind. The mode of his early royalist sympathies, if we accept these as given, called for an ideal of studied disinterestedness in the service of an idealized community. One could argue that this thinking came to the fore again as Cromwell brought order following the Civil Wars, and then again often in solidarity with Nonconformists after the restoration of the monarchy and the Church of England. Marvell's imaginative and social allegiances also appear multiple and pliable. His literary friendships included the "cavalier" circle of Thomas Stanley. James Loxley argues that the "cavalier," a category which he reevaluates, emphasizes wit and a

poetics of liberty; one of the duties of the “cavalier” is to “speak up” (613), as Marvell did in his late satires, rarely using his name publicly, his identity often an open secret.

I am led in reading these essays to speculate that Marvell’s early relative anonymity as a poet allowed him greater freedom in the long run as both an actor and a thinker. Marvell has a distinctive aptitude for inhabiting personae and speaking from within them. Edward Holberton explores the effect of prosopopoeia, of imitating voices other than one’s own for a variety of effects. Marvell gives us convincing ghostly versions of Ben Jonson and John Cleveland, for example, so that “voices maintain their ethos by adapting it to new circumstances” (107), as Marvell himself did. Annabel Brett explores Marvell as a “post-Machiavellian” thinker, set on seeing things as they are without always taking sides in the seeing. Alex Garganigo explores the role of Menippean satire in creating a satiric multivocality in *The Rehearsal Transpros’d*. Several essays explore Marvell’s reputation as a defender of liberty of conscience and governmental responsibility to act on behalf of the good of the nation, above party or faction.

A paradox lies at the core of Marvell’s body of work. The early lyrics remained, most likely, private or very narrowly circulated compositions in dialogue with models that were ancient and contemporary, Continental and British. Many of his later prose works appear to have been written with the identity of the author an open secret. They were topical, in direct response to the works of Anglican bishops or other Royalist antagonists. Perhaps Marvell’s late sense of self grew from his early poetics; clearly, the older poet preserved his early work. He left what appears to have been a carefully conceived collection; it is therefore likely that he imagined a literary afterlife of some sort. In comparison with Dryden or Milton, he remained during his lifetime less restrained or defined or contradicted by work shared in print. One of the more richly suggestive essays in this regard is Paul Davis’s study of Marvell and manuscript culture. Marvell’s “unreadable italic, his characterless character” preserved his works for print, “under his own Hand-writing” (222). For Davis, his use of “self-containing containers” incarnated what John Creaser describes elsewhere as a kind of “existential liberty” (208). Perhaps that free play was a necessity as well as an ultimately transformative and self-authorizing activity. And that activity imagined

itself as social. Helen Wilcox describes how music and musicality in Marvell's poems are driven by the "need for tough and determined post-lapsarian recovery and expansion" (269); it is a "sensual phenomenon with a cerebral effect" (271). Leah Marcus argues Marvell's aesthetic is tied to an interest in the new philosophy and the current of vitalism: humankind might repair the fall and restore Eden.

Marvell's view of a harmonious reparation of the fallen world worked for wide consolidation in the name of a greater good. John Rogers argues that Marvell puts on the "mantle of irony" in his dialogue with a more radically de-centered Miltonic liberty (686). Several of the essays present us with a Marvell who argued for a broad national church that would allow Protestants of a variety of beliefs to exist together amicably. Philip Connell maintains that he did not see nonconformists as "guilty of the sin of schism"; rather it was the new Laudians, as it were, who "departed from the traditions of the Church" (139). Marvell conceived of his own authority to repair the world within his writing. His literary personae are "self-authorizing" and distrustful of "sacerdotal and courtly authority" (143). Johanna Harris and N. H. Keeble explore Marvell's ties to nonconforming Protestants, including his friend Philip Lord Wharton. Many of his attacks on Anglican bishops are on their supposed "popery," as Kendra Packham argues (571). Mark Goldie traces Marvell's alignment with puritans within the Anglican Church, including Anglesey and Wharton (709). Johanna Harris's examinations of Marvell's letters argue they are comparable to Cicero's letters to Atticus, indications both of an inner life and an otherwise irrecoverable sociality. Marvell's voice can be heard in his correspondence with Edward Harley, as well. Martin Dzelzainis and Steph Coster describe him as "easily the most sarcastic, funny, and irreverent" of Harley's correspondents (557). That jocular wit's potency was not motivated only by the higher good, however. Timothy Raylor's study of the complicated competitive interplay between Marvell and Edmund Waller overturns general assumptions about a unidirectional or consistent line of influence in the *Advice to a Painter* "propaganda war" (642). For Raylor, their conflict stems from Marvell's "struggles with articulacy" (649) and the competition for patrons as well as ideology.

Diane Purkiss argues that, paradoxically, Marvell's literary afterlife includes a "libertine" version, his poems seen as comparable to those of the Cavaliers and works

by rakes like Rochester (737). Marvell's later work, Sean McDowell shows us, did in fact grow from London's freethinking urbanity, from the decidedly social milieu of coffee-house talk in the London of the 1660s and 1670s from which Marvell's "stage speech" in the late satires draws. Ashley Marshall and Robert D. Hume also read Marvell's implied reader in the late satires as a "coffee-house wit," a milieu explored in this volume by Goldie and others. Marvell's urbanity included a cosmopolitan openness. He draws from the Italian mannerist Marino, and his neo-Latin verse composed ambiguities that required "decoding," as Estelle Haan contends (480). McDowell traces Marvell's ties to Theophile de Viau, Saint Amant, Marino and Góngora. Though Marvell ultimately rejected the example of the *libertin*, particularly in his imaginative emphasis on sexual purity, he ultimately cultivated a Lucretian detached vision of the world as the source of true wisdom and virtue.

Marvell's use of the erotic is explored from a variety of perspectives. Lynn Enterline pursues the effect of Marvell's humanistic training in Latin (a subject explored profitably by Emma Wilson as well) and the effect of estrangement, particularly embodied in the retrospective gaze on "epicene innocence" (179). Warren Chernaik maintains that, in the satires, he "equates 'sexual defilement and political corruption'" (446). Edward Paleit argues his use of "classical similitudes" is a means to embody personal trauma and political crisis. Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker see his verse as being at least on some level regressive, imagining an impossible unity with the world: "for this poet the ontological and psychological were one" (405). Gordon Teskey sees all this differently. Marvell creates a "mad" "*persona*" in his lyrics (362); he asks us to differentiate between this character and the historical poet. The result of this differentiation and our perception of it is "a new category of experience. It is the adventure of art as a substitute for the eternally existing things above the sphere of the moon" (370). Nigel Smith focuses on Marvell's reshaping of the Greek Anthology to "propound something entirely and excellently fresh" (356), freeing the reader to escape conventional norms and behavior.

The final essays exploring Marvell's place in literary history, like those in earlier sections, suggest new avenues of inquiry. Annabel Patterson joins her enthusiastic voice with those who have been celebrating Marvell as a "patriot" and champion of

freedom of conscience. Michael O'Neill traces Marvell among the Romantics, including Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode" and what Keats and Leigh Hunt saw as his "negative capability," his ability to identify both with Cromwell and Charles I (764–5). Stephen Matthews explores Marvell's disparate imitators and admirers in the 20th and 21st centuries, among them John Ashberry, Thom Gunn, Robert Lowell, Derek Walcott, Derek Mahon, Geoffrey Hill, and Michael Donaghy.

The Oxford Handbook of Andrew Marvell draws from and builds on a series of excellent studies of Marvell as writer, political actor, and private person: Nigel Smith's critical edition, *The Poems of Marvell* (2003), and biography, *The Chameleon* (2010), and Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker's *Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell* (2011), among others, as well as early work by Pierre Legouis's biography (1928) and H.M. Margoliouth's *Poems and Letters* (1927). The collection continues in this tradition and uncovers and analyzes new evidence and opens important new lines of inquiry, showing the way for future work. It is an indispensable book for serious readers of Marvell.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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