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"Mourning" and the Gender Politics of Cavalier Joy

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By reading the Chlora of Marvell's "Mourning" as Mary Kirke, the married mistress of Francis Villiers, this essay utilizes Marvell's depiction of Kirke in "A Poem Upon the Death of My Lord Francis Villiers" as an intertext for "Mourning." Focusing on the turn from mourning to rejoicing in both poems, it shows how Marvell's critique of Cavalier joy in the Villiers elegy, exposing its violent narcissism and incoherent amorousness, informs a similar critique in "Mourning," made through the figure of a weeping Chlora-Kirke. The poem critiques the Cavalier ethos by having male observers project onto the lachrymose Chlora-Kirke their own notion of lusty joy, which had lost its pretensions to military glory by 1648. Such an argument reveals the misogynistic paradox at the heart of the Cavalier ethos: adulterous relations are valorized, but women's tears are compulsively scrutinized, so Cavalier mistresses are unable to mourn the death of their lovers even as the culture makes it seem possible. The essay concludes by suggesting that Marvell's depiction of Chlora-Kirke's tears in "Mourning" informs the poet's experiments with the gendered dynamics of weeping in his Commonwealth encomia, including *Upon Appleton House* and *The First Anniversary of the Government Under His Highness the Lord Protector*, as he grows tired of negatively associating women with weeping.



This essay is built on a speculative premise: the Chlora of Marvell's "Mourning" is, indeed, Mary Kirke, the married mistress of Francis Villiers. Such a premise relies on the editorial work of Elizabeth Donno and Nigel Smith, who both suggest a *terminus a quo* of July 1648 for "Mourning," on the evidence that a weeping Chlora also appears in "An Elegy Upon the Death of My Lord Francis Villiers," which Marvell must have written in July/August 1648, soon after Villiers's death.¹ It also relies on E.E. Duncan-Jones's suggestion, vis-à-vis Ludlow's memoirs, that the Chlora of the Villiers elegy is Kirke.² Although I do not present any further evidence substantiating this premise, reading the Chlora of "Mourning" as Mary Kirke allows us to utilize Marvell's depiction of Kirke in the Villiers elegy as an illuminating intertext.

In both poems, I focus on Marvell's turn from mourning to rejoicing. Marvell's glorification of a violent Villiers at the end of the elegy depends on his earlier, subtle critique of the soldier's violent, narcissistic joy, brought into relief by a weeping Kirke. In "Mourning," Marvell similarly utilizes a weeping Chlora-Kirke (as I will call her) to critique the joy of Cavalier and Royalist men, this time focusing on their pretensions to Platonic amorousness. The poem's male observers, I argue, project their own lusty notion of joy onto the lachrymose Chlora-Kirke. My argument overlaps with the one made by Kevin Laam in this special issue, insofar as he sharply articulates how Marvell "dismantle[s] ... the symbolic order of elegy" by thwarting readerly expectations concerning the ability of men to render women's tears sensible.³ But my argument differs in its emphasis on Marvell's process of assembling his own symbolic order, if not of elegy, then of elegiac weeping. To conclude, I suggest that fitting "Mourning" into a 1640s-era Cavalier poetics, recently described by James Loxley as "dynamic, multivocal, and capable of dissenting against itself,"⁴ allows us to appreciate how the poem's depiction of Chlora-Kirke's tears informs Marvell's experiments with the gendered dynamics of weeping in some of his most noteworthy Commonwealth encomia.

Before homing in on Kirke in the elegy and then "Mourning," it will be helpful to discuss Villiers, the object of her grief. Francis Villiers was born on 2 April 1629 and

¹ Andrew Marvell, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (Harmondsworth-Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972); and *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, rev. ed., ed. Nigel Smith, Longman Annotated English Poets (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 98. All citations of "Mourning," "An Elegy Upon the Death of My Lord Francis Villiers," *Upon Appleton House*, and *The First Anniversary of the Government under His Highness the Lord Protector* derive from Smith's edition. Line numbers will appear in parentheses.

² E.E. Duncan-Jones, "Notes on Marvell," *Notes and Queries* 198 (1953): 102.

³ Kevin Laam, "Marvell Against Mourning," *Marvell Studies* 7, no. 1 (2022): 8.

⁴ James Loxley, "Andrew Marvell and Cavalier Poetics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Martin Dzelzainis and Edward Holberton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 608.

received his education from royal tutors and Cambridge before enlisting in the Royalist army in 1642. After sequestering his estate, Villiers toured continental Europe, likely rubbing shoulders with Marvell in Rome before returning to England and participating in the Second Civil War, joining the (failed) Earl of Holland's rising. On 7 July 1648, Villiers—not twenty years old—was killed near Kingston upon Thames. The particularly brutal nature of the killing, which was even lamented by Parliamentarians, hit Royalists hard, for Villiers embodied the very ideal of male Cavalier beauty. However, Edmund Ludlow, who reported that Villiers had a romance with the married Mary Kirke, recognized that Villiers's choice to send his company before him and lavishly entertain Kirke the night before his death was ill-advised, allowing Parliamentary soldiers to stage a surprise attack the next day. Affirming their liaison was a lock of Kirke's hair found in a ribbon on Villiers's corpse.⁵

Marvell's elegy for Villiers is often considered Royalist in allegiance and Cavalier in style, but Loxley perceives tension between more typical elegies for fallen Royalists and Marvell's version of the genre.⁶ Materializing this tension is the contrast between the elegy's concluding glorification of Villiers and its earlier depiction of his joy. Villiers, who created his own epitaph by erecting a "whole pyramid / Of vulgar bodies" (116–17), does not need a poet to eternize his honor, so Marvell all but promises to trade writing for killing in the final couplet. And yet, the poet offers Villiers a "trophy" in this future act of killing: "the whole Army" (127–28). The poet synchronizes himself and Villiers through violent acts of vengeance, but he also trumps the fallen soldier's pyramid of bodies with the entirety of the New Model Army. That this slaughtered army simultaneously serves as Villiers's "tomb" (128) suggests that Marvell may be enacting the violent gamesmanship of the Cavalier ethos to critique it. The poet also critiques the Cavalier ethos earlier in the poem, suggesting that its emphasis on violence derives from narcissism. As Marvell knew from his experience fencing with Francis and his brothers in Italy,⁷ Villiers was a zealous soldier who derived "delight" (55) from combat:

Lovely and admirable as he was,
 Yet was his sword or armour all his glass.
 Nor in his mistress' eyes that joy he took,
 As in an enemy's himself to look. (51–54)

⁵ The biographical information on Villiers in this paragraph derives from Smith, *Poems*, 11–14; Duncan-Jones, "Notes," 102; and Edmund Ludlow, *The Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow, Lieutenant-General of the Horse in the Army of the Commonwealth of England, 1625–1672*, vol.1, ed. C.H. Firth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), 198.

⁶ James Loxley, "Prepar'd at Last to Strike in with the Tyde? Andrew Marvell and Royalist Verse," *Seventeenth Century* 10, no. 1 (1995): 47–48.

⁷ Smith, *Poems*, 16n55–58.

Gregory Chaplin reads these lines as Marvell's strained attempt at protecting Villiers from charges that his martial masculinity was subordinate to the whims of his mistress.⁸ Strained indeed: the lines end up highlighting Villiers's narcissism, admiring as he does his own reflection in the sword he wields, the armor he wears, and even the eyes of his enemies. The elegy presents these lines as demonstrating Villiers's "[p]rudence and valour" (42), but they actually place these political virtues at odds with one another. Villiers's military valor stems from his narcissism, which suggests that it is this very same narcissism, not sexual temptation per se, causing his imprudent decision to entertain Kirke the night before his death. Thus, the elegiac poet cannot turn mourning into rejoicing through a traditional depiction of heavenly apotheosis because Villiers's joy primarily derives not from without but from within: from his violent sense of self.

Marvell's juxtaposition of the eyes of Villiers's enemy with those of his "mistress" suggests that Kirke is involved in this critique of Villiers's joy. As with Villiers, some background on Kirke will help us appreciate Marvell's depictions of her in the elegy and "Mourning." Mary Townsend, as she was first known, was the daughter of Aurelian Townsend, the Cavalier poet. Like Villiers, Mary was known for her beauty, and her father's poetry demonstrates concern about her sexual reputation. Nevertheless, Mary very likely became, at various points, the mistress of the Elector Palatine and the Earl of Dorset. In 1646, however, she married George Kirke, a Groom of the Chamber for Charles I and an MP for Clitheroe. Mary Kirke, as she was now known, then became involved in an extramarital affair with Villiers, which likely intensified her reputation as a sexually profligate woman.⁹

In the Villiers elegy, Kirke is the opposite of sexually profligate. Her pious tears, in fact, compete with her soldier-lover's warfaring joy. In introducing "matchless Chlora" into the elegy, Marvell presents Kirke as possessing "pure fires" that can "warm" Villiers's soul and "charm" his passions (69–70). The poet then dedicates an entire stanza to idealizing their relationship as positively superseding reason, going so far as to construe the lovers as a new Adam and Eve, created by heaven to "restore man unto his first estate" (78). Honor and modesty, which lead the mistress to forego earthly desire and Villiers's touches, frame Chlora-Kirke's affective "argument" (67) in attempting to keep the soldier off the battlefield on that fateful day of 7 July 1648:

⁸ Gregory Chaplin, "Marvell and Elegy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Martin Dzelzainis and Edward Holberton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 411–12.

⁹ The biographical information on Mary Kirke in this paragraph derives from Smith, *Poems*, 11–14; Duncan-Jones, "Notes," 102; George Klawitter, *Andrew Marvell, Sexual Orientation, and Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2017), 61n10; and Aurelian Townsend, *Poems and Masques of Aurelian Townsend*, ed. Cedric C. Brown (Reading: Whiteknights Press, 1983), 67.

But who can paint the torments and that pain
 Which he professed and now she could not feign?
 He like the sun but overcast and pale:
 She like a rainbow, that ere long must fail,
 Whose roseal cheek where heaven itself did view
 Begins to sep'rate and dissolve to dew. (83-88)

Like a rainbow dissolving to dew, Kirke weeps upon Villiers's departure. The compulsive nature of Kirke's weeping—her tears “must” fall when heaven views her rosy face—suggests not only that Chlora-Kirke's weeping is divinely inspired: Kirke intuitively senses Villiers's impending tragedy. In contrast to Chlora-Kirke's tears, Villiers's profession of torment and pain derives from his greater devotion to “war” and “bold adventures” (92-93), which aligns with the violent portrait of the soldier at the end of the elegy. In depicting the relationship between Villiers and the married Kirke, Marvell has his cake and eats it too; he celebrates the unique culture of courtly love by dedicating an entire stanza to their adulterous relationship, but he ever so slightly condemns it, not only by highlighting Villiers's dogged militarism, but by intimating that this seemingly Platonic union is unidirectional, guided and followed only by Kirke. Influentially, Nicholas McDowell argues that Marvell's Villiers elegy demonstrates skepticism towards Cavalier notions of eroticism.¹⁰ This is indeed true, if we focus our attention on Villiers. If, however, we focus on Chlora-Kirke, the shedder of prophetic tears, a reconfiguration of Cavalier eroticism emerges.

Turning now to Chlora-Kirke's tears in “Mourning,” we can appreciate how Marvell extends the critique of Cavalier love culture made in the elegy. After contemplating whether Chlora-Kirke's tears are “bending upwards” (7) towards heaven or “strow[ing] the ground where Strephon lay” (12), stanza IV points out that some onlookers see her tears as doubling back inwards, “soften[ing] near her heart” to allow for “[a] place to fix another wound” (15-16). Chlora-Kirke's tearful narcissism in stanza V looks something like Villiers's militaristic narcissism in the elegy. Villiers's joyful militarism made him best suited to show the “pomp of his own death” (“Elegy,” 124), and Chlora-Kirke is restrained by “vain Pomp” (17), privately “court[ing] herself in am'rous rain” (19). Whereas the elegy could only hint at critiquing Villiers's narcissism, on account of Marvell's real-world affiliation with the soldier, “Mourning” can be prescriptive about Chlora-Kirke's pomposity. We must remember, however, that Chlora-Kirke's narcissism is the affirmation of “some” onlookers. Marvell's caesura in the first line of

¹⁰ Nicholas McDowell, *Poetry and Allegiance in the English Civil Wars: Marvell and the Cause of Wit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 178-79.

stanza IV—“Yet some affirm, pretending art, / Her eyes have so her bosom drowned” (13-14)—renders ambiguous his own feelings regarding who in this scenario is “pretending art”: the weeping Chlora-Kirke, or the onlookers. If we read the “affirming some” as the duplicitous artificers of this stanza, then their vision of the mistress’ narcissistic weeping is a projection of their own narcissism onto Chlora-Kirke. She is seen fixing another wound near her heart only because the royalists and their Cavalier culture have been wounded by the Civil Wars.

“Mourning” particularly targets Cavalier joy in stanzas VI and VII, where the elegy turns towards rejoicing. At first blush, the joy of stanza VI is erotic, confirming that Chlora-Kirke’s tears are meant to attract a new suitor. But as with the affirming some of stanza IV, the narrower set of onlookers in stanza VI frames the reader’s understanding of Chlora-Kirke’s tears:

Nay others, bolder, hence esteem
 Joy now so much her master grown,
 That whatsoever does but seem
 Like grief, is from her windows thrown. (21–24)

The caesura in the first line more clearly attaches the boldness of the stanza onto the observers, not the weeping Chlora-Kirke. If her tears are but semblances of grief thrown from her windows, it is because these “bold others” wish to wait outside—or are already waiting outside—as suitors. It is possible to read Chlora-Kirke in this stanza as discarding her tears and thereby her grief, trading lachrymose sorrow for dry-eyed joy. But the preponderance of Petrarchan convention undercuts this possibility, rendering tears as “thrown” *to* suitors, not *out* or *away*. The Petrarchan cliché engaged in this stanza—the eyes as windows into the soul—seems to suggest that Chlora-Kirke, throwing favors to suitors, embodies the kind of courtly love culture animating this cliché. But like condensation, tears would obfuscate any clear view into Chlora-Kirke’s soul, signaling that Marvell wants readers to see the bold others, not Chlora-Kirke, as dealing in this tired Petrarchism. In the absence of meaningful militarism, the bold onlookers turn to extramarital love, the other side of the Cavalier culture coin.

If joy is Chlora-Kirke’s master in stanza VI, stanza VII makes Chlora-Kirke herself a master. Here, the bold onlookers assess Chlora-Kirke at the height of her lachrymose joy:

Nor that she pays, while she survives,
 To her dead love this tribute due,

But casts abroad these donatives,
At the installing of a new. (25-28) .

Marvell's diction in describing the gifts Chlora-Kirke casts abroad—"donatives"—is certainly monetary, which would render tears as payment. But as noted earlier, the Petrarchism of stanza VI suggests that Chlora-Kirke is still weeping in stanza VII, which means that she has not quite exchanged tears for joy; more accurately, the poet is crafting an idiosyncratic image of joyful tears. To articulate the effect of this image, we must appreciate the military connotation of donatives. Nigel Smith notes that the term refers to official gifts marking an occasion, and Michael Craze explains its derivation from the ancient Roman *donativum*—the largescale distribution of small coins by patricians.¹¹ More specifically, *donativum* were payments to soldiers during the imperial period, often commemorating military victories.¹² Focusing less on the material form of donatives (coins) and more on their occasional setting (military victories) allows for the irony of the image to emerge, especially when "Mourning" is viewed in conversation with the Villiers elegy. If Chlora-Kirke is shelling out payments to soldiers, then she is oddly doing so on the occasion of their defeat. It makes more sense, then, to read "donatives" as an imputation coming from Chlora-Kirke's Royalist, Cavalier onlookers. If Marvell intends for this militaristic subtext to be visible, then stanza VII suggests that the Royalists, who had lost the Civil Wars, are now commanded by someone like Mary Kirke: a married mistress. In the absence of military joy secured through a successful warrior-king, the Royalists pay loyalty to a courtly love culture that celebrates adultery, the last refuge for obtaining a distinctly "Cavalier" joy.

With "Mourning," Marvell suggests that the purportedly "unique" love culture of Cavalier courtiers, "flout[ing] the boundaries of relationships provided by marriage and family honour," as Smith puts it,¹³ is, by 1648, incoherent. And yet, Marvell avoids overt condemnations of this sort; "Mourning" fits into Loxley's conception of a multivocal Cavalier poetics capable of self-dissension. The final stanza of the poem best captures the poet's position in 1648: he "[d]isput[es] not" what the Royalists "believe," but he also keeps his judgment of them "silent," at least in the domain of public speech (33-34). In the domain of poetry, Marvell leaves a trace of his "silent judgment" of Cavalier love culture (33). The valorization of adulterous relations cannot coexist with reflexive scrutiny of women's tears because mistresses will *never* be able to mourn the death of

¹¹ See Smith, *Poems*, 101n27; and Michael Craze, *The Life and Lyrics of Andrew Marvell* (London: Macmillan Press, 1979), 68.

¹² Brian Campbell, "Donativum," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹³ Nigel Smith, *Andrew Marvell: The Chameleon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 72.

their lovers, which the culture suggests should be possible, since these relations signify a Platonic ideal. “Mourning” arrives at a consideration of this gender double standard through a Cavalier poetics that can critically gaze upon itself.

As a poem that engages with Cavalier gender tropes to question them, “Mourning” provides insight into how Marvell began experimenting with the gender dynamics of weeping poetry in the Commonwealth era. After 1648, Marvell would poeticize Cavalier men discharging tears onto a marriageable woman, instead of a woman discharging tears onto male suitors. Recall stanza LXXXX of *Upon Appleton House* (1651), in which Marvell depicts Mary Fairfax handling her future suitors. She is able to “prevent” (anticipate) those “trains” (bullets) meant for her, including tears, the “wat’ry shot that pierce the mind” (713-15). By portraying tears as bullets, Marvell suggests that, without a war to fight, Royalists turn to aggressively courting the daughter of their enemy, a Parliamentarian general. Mary’s future wedding and progeny are figured as a source of joy (737-44), but her marriage to George Villiers, Francis’s brother, in 1657 was an unhappy one.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Marvell’s depiction of Mary Fairfax exemplifies Leah Marcus’s argument that the poem “‘redeems’ Royalist motifs by wresting them out of their Caroline context and giving them new and autonomous points of departure.”¹⁵ The lusty female weeper becomes weeping bachelors, and male suitors become a prescient maiden.

During the Cromwellian Protectorate, Marvell would reappropriate the image of the artful female weeper. Recall the stanza in *The First Anniversary of the Government under His Highness the Lord Protector* (1654-55) where the poet reflects on Cromwell’s near-death experience during a coaching accident. Marvell utilizes a weaving simile to convey how a company of weepers, which he identifies with, integrates the “one sorrow” of the Protectorate’s first year into its “other glories” (181-82):

Like skilful looms which through the costly thread
Of purling ore, a shining wave do shed:
So shall the tears we on past grief employ,
Still as they trickle, glitter in our joy. (183-86)

Here, the artifice of these weepers is not synonymous with their insincere sorrow. Their artifice resides in their skill; they thread silver through a golden tapestry, “employ[ing]” sorrow to enhance joy. Through this weaving simile, Marvell links domestic weeping

¹⁴ Smith, *Chameleon*, 141.

¹⁵ Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 261.

to a modest piety, juxtaposing the weepers with “impious men” who, by delighting in Cromwell’s accident, are “deceived with pleasure short” (189). As he did with the Royalists in *Upon Appleton House*, Marvell imputes dissimulation to his enemies (this time, the radical sectarians), but tears are not the signs of this dissimulation. Diane Purkiss usefully links Marvell’s Cromwell poems to the desire for a “pre-civilized childhood state,” with the Lord Protector as guardian of the largely feminine world of the household.¹⁶ In *The First Anniversary*, tears are signs of a bourgeois productivity within a pious household, enacted either by women or by positively feminized workers.¹⁷ This image is certainly distinct from the image of joyful tears-as-donatives in “Mourning,” especially considering that it is deployed to praise, rather than condemn, militarism, in the figure of Cromwell. Nevertheless, it certainly owes something to the poem’s manipulation of the gender tropes surrounding weeping.

Increasingly, Marvell grows tired of associating women with weeping in a negative manner, an attitude that begins to emerge in the depiction of Chlora-Kirke’s joyful tears in “Mourning.” In July–August 1648, Marvell was certainly a Cavalier poet, but “Mourning” constitutes a transitional moment in which the poet subtly critiques the gender politics of the Cavalier ethos by enacting this gender politics. Indeed, we see Marvell beginning to experiment with the gendering of tears, an experimentation that would come to inform a unique poetics of weeping that attempts to articulate a politics grounded in the “feminine” world of productive domesticity.

¹⁶ Diane Purkiss, “Thinking of Gender,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell*, ed. Derek Hirst and Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 82.

¹⁷ For a fleshed-out version of this argument, see Stephen Spencer, “Like Skillful Looms: Marvell, Cromwell, and the Politics of Weeping,” *Marvell Studies* 4, no. 2 (2019): 1–32.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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