Andrew Marvell's Gender

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Introductory note

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Essay body

It has been apparent for many years that Andrew Marvell often seems to identify object with subject, or to treat them as interchangeable: to roll them up into one self-enclosed unit which contains its own opposite. In 1978, Christopher Ricks, contributing to the York lectures on the tercentenary of Marvell's death, noted that a characteristic figure in Marvell's poetry is the use of reflexive imagery, where something is compared to itself or to an aspect of itself; so the drop of dew is '*Like* its own Tear' – what Empson calls a 'self-inwoven' simile.[1] Such reflexive *imagery* is merely a subset of a more general reflexivity which pervades Marvell's writing: for example, when Chlora 'courts herself in am'rous rain; / Herself both Danaë and the show'r' ('Mourning', ll. 19–20), the reflexivity is not exactly a property of the metaphor (though it is closely tied to it). In the next lecture, John Carey

[1] Christopher Ricks, "'Its Own Resemblance'", in C. A. Patrides (ed.), *Approaches to Marvell: The York Tercentenary Lectures*, (1978), pp. 108–35 (p. 111). All emphasis in quotations is original. William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930; 1953), 160.

says that 'situations in which an agent finds its actions shooting back upon itself ... are curiously frequent in Marvell's poems once one starts to look'[2]: 'Round in itself incloses'; 'By his own scythe, the mower mown' and the cunning with which Cromwell induces Charles to become his own pursuer, chasing himself 'To Caresbrook's narrow case'.[3] Carey sees this reflexivity as related to something with which, he argues, Marvell was preoccupied: 'the self-defeating reversibility of our actions.' Carey suggests that the point of Marvell's use of reflexivity is to warn us that everything we do, whatever else it might accomplish, has its first and (for us) most important effect upon ourselves.

As Marvell erodes the seemingly essential distinction between subject and object, it may be that the impulse to do something similar with another grammatical feature prompted him to engage in a more wide ranging interrogation of gender. In recommending the younger poet to John Bradshaw, Milton vouched for the fact that Marvell had spent 'foure yeares abroad', in the course of which he learned the languages of the Netherlands, France, Italy and Spain.[4] He was already very proficient in Latin, as we know both from his poetry in that language and from his diplomatic correspondence (which came later but for which he was already obviously prepared). It would not be surprising if such comparative linguistic study led him to think about gender. Three of the languages mentioned by Milton (the exception is Dutch) manage to get by quite well without a neuter gender. Classical Latin, in contrast, made no attempt to do so. The reduction of the number of genders to two is a later development; and it seems to follow that the reduction is a simplification of a system of categorisation that had come to appear more complex than it needed to be.

English takes a different approach. While retaining the three genders, English tended to restrict the application of masculine and feminine to living (and sexually differentiated) beings and to treat almost everything inanimate as neuter.[5] It could be argued that this had two complementary ef-

[2]John Carey, 'Reversals Transposed: an Aspect of Marvell's Imagination', in Patrides (ed.), *Approaches to Marvell*, pp. 136–54 (p. 144).

[3]'On a Drop of Dew', l. 6; 'Damon the Mower', l. 80; 'An Horatian Ode', l. 52.

[4]Nicholas von Maltzahn, *An Andrew Marvell Chronology* (Basingstoke, 2005), p. 38.

[5]Anne Curzan, *Gender Shifts in the History of English* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 19, writes of 'the transformation of the English gender system' between Old and Middle English. 'As grammatical gender erodes in the noun phrase in early Middle English ... the personal pronouns are the only forms to retain gender, and they shift to natural gender. Pronominal

fects. In the first place, by appertaining to many more things than either of the others, neuter came to seem hardly a gender at all, but rather the absence of gender.[6] At the same time, the distinction between sex and gender as systems of classification became much less significant, since it could be assumed that there was a high degree of overlap between the female and the feminine on the one hand, and between the masculine and the male on the other. In short, there was a tendency for gender to appear as a simple binary system of opposites. In the case of someone educated in Latin, this tendency was counteracted by the periodic reminder that neuter did not govern a realm free of gender, but was just one gender among three. In many contexts, the feminine would appear to be the opposite of the masculine, in that to deny the latter quality to some action or person was to ascribe to it the former. In others, however, neuter could seem to be the negation of both masculinity and femininity, forcing them into a temporary, unstable alliance. As a result, each gender may appear to have not one opposite but two, which are themselves in conflict. Whether this makes, say, masculinity seem more vulnerable (as assailed on all sides) or less (as facing a divided opposition) is very much a matter of perception, which is liable to shift from one moment to another, particularly if the perceiver already fears he may be under attack. Some of the hostile responses to the first part of *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, notably Richard Leigh's *The Transproser Rehears'd*, do not find it necessary to reconcile the imputation of effeminacy with the suggestion that their target is a eunuch.[7] Presumably, this imprecision was not seen as weakening the attack.

How, then, would somebody whose first language was English, and who had next acquired an enviable command of Latin, respond to the discovery of French, Spanish and Italian? If, like Marvell, he was someone whose particular habits of mind brought him to attempt the fusion (and, failing that, the confusion) of the agent with the acted-upon, it is to be expected that the opportunity to shift between a binary opposition and something whose conflicts are less stark and more complex would appeal to his imagination.

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gender systems, in general, tend to favor a shift to semantic assignment.'

[6]Curzan cites P. A. Erades, among others, as concluding that 'English has no gender at all': Curzan, *Gender Shifts in the History of English*, p. 22. As against that, Corbett proposes that 'languages in which pronouns present the only evidence for gender should be recognized as having a gender system', distinguishing them as 'pronominal gender systems': Greville G. Corbett, *Gender* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 5.

[7]Paul Hammond, 'Marvell's Sexuality', *Seventeenth Century*, 11 (1996), 87–123: 91–3.

His poetry provides us with evidence that this was indeed ry opposition and something whose conflicts are less stark and more complex would the case.

The tendency of the English approach to make neuter all but invisible and to align the two other genders closely with the sexes is illustrated in Paul Hammond's discussion of Marvell's pronouns. Having noted that 'Young Love' 'includes no gendered nouns or pronouns', thus providing 'indefinition' which 'creates space for the reader's mind to play', Hammond continues:

> Something similar happens in 'The Definition of Love' – love which is 'begotten by despair / Upon Impossibility' – where once again there are no pronouns to indicate the sex of the poet's desired lover.[8]

However, while the 'object' may not have a sex, it is represented by a pronoun whose gender is as conspicuous as it is unexpected: the neuter 'It':

> My love is of a birth as rare
> As 'tis for object strange and high:
> It was begotten by Despair
> Upon Impossibility. ('The Definition of Love', ll. 1–4)

Love, which is called an object, is grammatically the subject of the sentence. Since it is 'My' love, the person whose object it is must be the speaker. But, when a person speaks of 'my love', we expect the object to be another person, not (as Hammond says is the case here) an abstraction. Since love is, in differing senses, both subject and object, we seem to be close to that reflexivity which Carey and Ricks found characteristic of Marvell.

So, the way in which Marvell plays with gender has something in common with his games with subject and object; and it is in 'The Definition of Love' that the connection is easiest to discern. The word 'subject' is present in the poem only by implication, of course, but its range of signification has implications for Marvell's use of 'object'. 'Subject' derives from the Latin sub and iacere (which suggest being thrown under) and applies to someone who is under the rule of another. In that sense, a subject is necessarily the object in some relationship, such as that of ruled to ruler, or contingent event to condition. Yet we regularly find ourselves attempting to use it to mean

[8]Paul Hammond, 'Marvell's Pronouns', *Essays in Criticism*, 53 (2003), 219–35: 221.

something more autonomous: a (relatively) undetermined originator of actions, as in the subject of a sentence. This contradiction is less stark than it might seem at first, in that the subject of any sentence is – at least potentially and more often actually – the object of a different one: the wholly undetermined actor is extremely rare. It is striking, too, that there we find a similar contradiction in the term 'agent', which means someone who acts, but also refers to the representative of another, an entity which can be seen as merely an instrument of its principal.

That two words which designate an entity which enjoys a degree of freedom and autonomy also mean someone who is controlled or directed by someone else suggests that we are so ill at ease with the notion of unconstrained freedom of action that we choose to speak about it using words which tend to negate themselves. 'Object' is a less obviously self-contradictory term but it too contains a range of barely compatible meanings. It is the passive term in a relationship, the one which suffers the effects of an action rather than being its cause. Yet we use 'object' and (adjectival) 'objective' to refer to things which have an existence independent of and external to ourselves: to refer to something as an object is often to ascribe to it a quality of self-containedness or self-sufficiency. In its sense of *aim* or *goal*, it is not the thing which acts but, perhaps more importantly, the reason the actions are taken. Marvell glances at something of the sort in *The First Anniversary*:

> Thee proof beyond all other force or skill
> Our sins endanger, and shall one day kill (ll. 173–4)

English words generally do not have case markers. As with gender, pronouns are the exceptions, though even pronouns may hide their case (compare *I/me* or *they/them* with *you* and *it*). In these lines, the object is the very first word in the sentence, as its case makes clear. It is followed by a subordinate clause which qualifies it, so we reach the subject and verb only in the next line. Placing the object first and insulating it from the other essential elements of the sentence, Marvell emphasises its significance (in the process, drawing a parallel between the Lord Protector and Christ). Elsewhere, of course, he relies on the absence of case markers in English nouns to open the possibility of reading a clause in both directions.[9]

[9]For example, in 'An Horatian Ode', lines 21–4, 'Cæsar's head' is the object of the clause, but can appear to be its subject if we read 'blast' as intransitive: see Barbara Everett, 'The Shooting of the Bears: Poetry and Politics in Andrew Marvell', in *Poets in their Time: Essays on English Poetry from Donne to Larkin* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 32–71 (p. 46).

In the context of love that 'is for object strange and high', it is clear that the primary sense is an 'objective' (used as a noun); it is equally clear that this is not the only sense in play. That the object is neuter (and therefore impersonal) reinforces the sense that it will not be changed: the relationship (whatever it may be) will not have a lasting or noticeable effect on it. The actions of the subject hardly concern it, though they are all about it.

In the next line, we learn who were the parents of this love-object, with Despair taking the male role and Impossibility the female.[10] Despair is 'magnanimous', presumably in freeing us from the distracting and potentially immobilising illusion of 'feeble' hope (l. 7). Can one still have an object if one has truly relinquished hope of attaining it? Though a term in a relationship, the object is not dependent on the relationship for its existence – even for its existence *as object*, in at least one sense of that word.

We may suspect that, by assigning the pronoun 'It' to the subject which is also an object, Marvell creates a kind of amphibium.[11] If each of the other genders closely corresponds to one of the sexes, there would seem to be just two possibilities open to neuter: it may represent the exclusion of both sexes or their unity (either a eunuch or an androgyne). The very starkness of the opposition between these two alternatives may give rise to a third in which our abstraction hovers, balanced between the poles of mutual exclusion and mutual comprehension. An attempt to interpret the neuter Love as including (or excluding) both male and female is open to the objection that, as Hammond warns us, the language of the poem does not warrant the assumption that the object of the speaker's love is female. Strictly speaking, neither is there any explicit statement that the speaker is male, though we easily infer it from (primarily) the imagery, the 'decrees of steel' and 'truly parallel' lines (ll. 17, 27). At the very least it can be said that, when a poet writes of love and its[12] object, he or she opens the *possibility* that both sexes and more than one gender are involved.

Hammond elsewhere draws our attention to the connection in Marvell's poetry between the reflexive quality (or unity of subject and object) on the

[10] Compare Cromwell as 'the War's and Fortune's son' ('An Horatian Ode', l. 113), where the respective sexes of the parents are not made explicit, though they are not in doubt: Marvell does not depart from the convention by which Fortune was depicted as female.

[11] See 'Upon Appleton House', l. 774; 'The Unfortunate Lover', l. 40; and Derek Hirst and Steven N. Zwicker, *The Orphan of the Hurricane* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 81–2.

[12] Where the context so admits, words importing one gender should be construed as including the other two.

one hand and the elusiveness of gender on the other. The connection is at its most obvious in the reference to Douglas's 'yellow locks', which 'curl back themselves to seek' (*The Last Instructions*, l. 653). Describing the story of Narcissus as 'a multivalent myth', Hammond tells us:

> Readers of Marvell's poetry have remarked upon his recurrent use of figures of reflection, enclosure and self-resemblance. Repeatedly, Marvell imagines something seeing or seeking its own reflection, being like itself, being satisfied only with its own reflection.[13]

Part of the multivalency of this myth, according to Hammond, lies in its serving simultaneously as a figure of autoeroticism or self-love and of homoeroticism, since:

> ... the male gaze is enraptured by a male image, heedless of the charms of the female represented by Echo. (p. 102)

Hammond makes a convincing case that the Narcissus myth is a powerful presence in Marvell's poems, even though it is mentioned explicitly only once, in the context of the river which is compared to a '*Chrystal Mirrour* ... Where all things gaze themselves, and doubt / If they be in it or without.'[14] The omission of the preposition 'at' makes it sound as if studying one's reflection is a reflexive act of self-constitution. This is a figure which occurs elsewhere in Marvell's poetry and it may be that the association with Narcissus is implied in those other instances as well. One example (discussed by Ricks, '"Its Own Resemblance"', p. 110) is to be found in 'An Elegy Upon the Death of My Lord Francis Villiers':

> 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. (ll. 51–4)

[13] 'Marvell's Sexuality', pp. 101–2.

[14] Hammond, 'Marvell's Sexuality', pp. 102–3, quoting 'Upon Appleton House', ll. 636–8. It has been pointed out that the myth is present by implication in the final line of 'Upon a Eunuch: a Poet': Hirst and Zwicker, *The Orphan of the Hurricane*, p. 113; they also cite *Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Nigel Smith, (2003), p. 82, n. to l. 27 of 'To His Coy Mistress'.

Unlike Echo, Villiers's mistress is not ignored but rather demoted to an inferior position: it is in viewing himself in an enemy's eyes that the young soldier experiences most 'joy' (though there does not seem to be any hint that he neglected Mrs. Kirke). A few lines earlier, Marvell has offered an unequivocal answer to the question whether attributes of the opposing sexes mutually cancel each other or are complementary:

> 'Tis truth that beauty doth most men dispraise:
> Prudence and valour their esteem doth raise.
> But he that hath already these in store,
> Cannot be poorer sure for having more.
> And his unimitable handsomeness
> Made him indeed be more than man, not less. (ll. 63–7)

Prudence and valour are manly (and therefore presumably masculine) qualities, according to this. Villiers's manliness is not diminished by the addition of beauty, an attribute which is, in most circumstances, inimical to masculinity: 'beauty doth most men dispraise'. It is not here treated as specifically *feminine*, unless one assumes that masculine and feminine form a pair of binary opposites.

The association of possibly Narcissistic reflection, unmasculine good looks and self-constitution in Marvell's work is at its most apparent in *The Last Instructions to a Painter*. Like Villiers, the Dutch Admiral De Ruyter seems to bring himself into existence with his own reflected gaze:[15]

> The sun much brighter, and the skies more clear,
> He finds the air and all things sweeter here.
> The sudden change, and such a tempting sight
> Swells his old veins with fresh blood, fresh delight.
> Like am'rous victors he begins to shave,
> And his new face looks in the English wave. (ll. 529–34)

[15] Self-generation in Marvell is not always or only associated with reflections. I have argued that, if it is true that Marvell uses imagery of cæsarean section in 'An Horatian Ode' ll. 13–16 (Jim Swan, '"Cæsarean Section": The Destruction of Enclosing Bodies in Marvell's "Horatian Ode"', *Psychocultural Review* 1 (1977), 1–8), it must be significant that it is through Cromwell's *own* side that he divides 'his fiery way': Art Kavanagh, *Andrew Marvell's Ambivalence about Justice*, unpublished PhD thesis, (Royal Holloway University of London, 2012), pp. 47–8.

In each of these cases, the absence of the preposition ('at') highlights the tightness of the circle of reflexivity (and of reflection). Marvell invites us to imagine that the object at which De Ruyter, Villiers or any of the denizens of Nun Appleton estate looks so intently is not something separate from the gazer – it is the gazer him- or herself.

Captain Archibald Douglas, who was burnt alive on the *Royal Oak*, exhibits apparently feminine qualities of beauty and delicacy which, like those of Lord Francis Villiers, complement rather than take away from his manly virtues of courage and obedience to duty. Much has already been written, particularly in the last two decades, about the treatment of Douglas in *The Last Instructions to a Painter* but some puzzles remain. According to John Creaser:

> The strangest but also the most distinctively Marvellian episode in the Restoration satires is the death by fire of the soldier Archibald Douglas ... Although Douglas was a married man in real life, and although he is being celebrated for his valour, he is lingeringly described as a virginal and epicene beauty, an Adonis or Leander, with some of the qualities of Narcissus.[16]

Having cited lines 653–4 of the poem, Creaser adds that, as Marvell misleadingly presents it, Douglas's 'life has been one of pervasive but unrealized sexuality'. In Creaser's formulation, we have an apparent opposition, one of the poles of which contains two elements which are not entirely at one. He suggests, in the first place, that the valour seems to be in conflict with the epicene quality but that in turn is undercut by the entirely fictional virginity. If Douglas's beauty suggests *unrealized* sexuality, it is to that extent less epicene: it is closer to asexuality than to androgyny. It seems to follow that Marvell presents the beautiful Douglas as tending more to the neuter than to the feminine – but unstably so. (Whatever other reasons he may have for suppressing Douglas's roles as father and husband, Marvell implies that a soldier going dutifully to his death necessarily acts as someone who has not, in Bacon's phrase, given hostages to fortune.)

On the face of it, whether we regard the presentation of Douglas as epicene, androgynous or one of 'pervasive but unrealized sexuality', the association of such qualities with his undoubted heroism seems to require

[16] John Creaser, '"As one scap't strangely from Captivity": Marvell and Existential Liberty', in Warren Chernaik and Martin Dzelzainis (eds.), *Marvell and Liberty*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 144–172 (pp. 154–5).

explanation. David Farley-Hills suggests that the explanation is to be found in the 'inversion' of our expectations:

> It is only in a country where standards have been inverted that the poet must seek heroic standards among his country's enemies or foreign allies ... [I]n the loyal Scot passage there is an intentional irony in the stress on Douglas's apparent effeminacy and actual virility (649–52), which inverts the 'female' Stuart's much publicised virility, but actual effeminacy. ... It is no accident that the positive values of the poem inhere principally in two foreigners, a Dutchman [De Ruyter] and a Scot [Douglas]. In this the poem is an inversion of the great national epic that Renaissance writers such as Spenser sought to write to celebrate the best values of their own societies.[17]

As far as it goes, this makes sense of the treatment of Douglas and De Ruyter in the context of a satire on the conduct of the English Court. That is not to say, however, that it fully accounts for the strangeness (as Creaser puts it) of depicting the heroic soldier as an 'epicene beauty' while at the same time drawing parallels between him and the enemy admiral.

The treatment of both Villiers and Douglas suggests that Marvell is using the close connection (which does not, however, amount to an exact alignment) between sex and gender in the English natural gender classification, to show that masculinity is not essential to maleness (nor, by implication, do femaleness and femininity necessarily go together). To complicate the situation further, if the 'manly' virtues of courage and steadfastness do not necessarily go with masculine characteristics, neither can they be said to be inherent in maleness. The satire provides several examples of men who have failed to exhibit these virtues, from the Chancellor, Hyde, who balks at summoning the Parliament (ll. 469–74), to Douglas's fellow-soldiers, who abandon their posts (ll. 629–48). It may be precisely because being a male does not necessarily entail manliness that Marvell is keen to show that neither does masculinity.

Marvell's feminine young men, whatever else they may be, are conspicuously brave. The reader may not be able to resist raising an eyebrow at the ascription of 'Prudence' (l. 64) to Villiers but the nobleman's valour is

[17] David Farley-Hills, *The Benevolence of Laughter: Comic Poetry of the Commonwealth and Restoration* (1974), pp. 85, 87–8.

evident; just as Douglas's courage is not disputed, even if one agrees with Creaser that there is an element of stubborn self-regard to his finally pointless self-sacrifice ('Marvell and Existential Liberty', pp. 155–6). So far as we can judge from his writings, Marvell placed a high value on bravery, a value that was in part a function of its rarity: 'We are all venal cowards, except some few'.[18] It is worth noting that, where Marvell presents a female persona who shows masculine characteristics, it is less clear that she has a similarly admirable overriding quality. While it would be difficult to deny that this differing treatment of men and women owes something to misogyny, perhaps a more important factor is that Marvell is careful to impute apparently feminine qualities only to these men who have manly virtues 'in store', lest he appear to 'dispraise' them.

On the face of it, when in *The Third Advice* Lady Albemarle is represented as an animal, the sex of that animal does not seem to be of any significance. She is the 'monkey Duchess' (l. 171), seen in the 'posture just of a four-footed beast' (l. 186). The only indication that the monkey and the four-footed beast are *masculine* animals comes in a couplet whose line-endings are anything but:

> She dried no tears, for she was too viraginous:
> But only snuffing her trunk cartilaginous (ll. 191–2)

'Viraginous', while importing masculine characteristics, is an adjective that is ordinarily applied only to a woman. It thus illustrates in a single word the idea that gender and sex are not precisely coterminous categories, however monstrous or grotesque their separation might appear. Further, though *The Third Advice* on its own does not permit us to draw any very firm conclusion as to the sex of the beast to which the duchess is compared, it is tempting to read this satire in conjunction with *The Last Instructions*, where her husband too is likened to an animal. As Albemarle helplessly watches the Dutch capture the *Royal Charles*, the poet draws a parallel between the general's frustration and rage and those of a tigress who, from the far side of the river, sees her cubs taken by 'Robbers' (l. 624):

> At her own Breast her useless claws does arm;
> She tears herself since him she cannot harm. (l. 627–8)

[18] *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, 3rd edn. by Pierre Legouis with E. E. Duncan-Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1971), ii. 317.

If it is legitimate to read these two Painter poems as parts of a single narrative, the treatment of Albemarle as a fierce, ineffectual tigress and his duchess as an implicitly male monkey complicates our view of Lady Albemarle as a Cassandra-like truth-teller.[19]

It would appear from the foregoing that any discussion of gender in Marvell will have difficulty in getting very far away from *The Last Instructions*. This satire also contains Marvell's allusion to the Skimmington Ride, which he describes as

> A punishment invented first to awe
> Masculine wives transgressing Nature's law (ll. 377–8)

The 'brawny' husband-beater is not the only one subjected to the punishment. She and the husband who has failed to control her are alike mounted on 'lean jade', a worn-out horse, and paraded through the streets to the 'hooting' of children and the banging of sticks on kettles. Marvell presents this as a form of community justice, preferable to a jury's award of damages to the husband or the binding of the wife by 'partial justice' to keep the peace:

> Prudent Antiquity, that knew by shame,
> Better than law, domestic crimes to tame (ll. 387–8)

He encourages the painter to whom the satire is addressed to join him in likewise subjecting offending behaviour to ridicule:

> So thou and I, dear painter, represent
> In quick effigy, others' faults, and feign
> By making them ridiculous, to restrain (ll. 390–2)

The use of 'feign', given emphasis by its position as a line-ending rhyme word, is the first clear hint we are given that the poet is less approving of the methods of 'Prudent Antiquity' than he says he is. Nigel Smith suggests that two of the *OED*'s definitions, 'contrive' and 'pretend', are at work.[20] Marvell has used 'feign' similarly as a rhyme word in 'Tom May's Death' (ll.

[19] See Martin Dzelzainis, '"Presbyterian Sibyl": Truth-telling and Gender in Andrew Marvell's *The Third Advice to a Painter*', in Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne (eds.), *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England*, (2007), pp. 111–28.

[20] *Poems of Andrew Marvell*, p. 378, note to l. 391.

95–6), a poem centrally concerned with fiction, and in particular the fiction of a punishment which fits the crime: it features a poet accused of writing misleading history, sentenced in Elysium by the shade of another poet to 'what torments poets ere did feign'.[21] It is possible that, in *The Last Instructions*, 'feign' is used in a third sense as a homophone: the poet and the painter would *fain* correct the faults of the court and the king's ministers by holding them up to ridicule but they have no great hopes that their attempts to rectify the actions of those in power will succeed. Because justice demands at least that the absurdity of official actions should be ridiculed, they will pretend to believe that they are performing this function, even if the exposure does not work to 'restrain' the offending behaviour.

Marvell appears to draw the lesson of the Skimmington Ride by spelling out the parallels between the disputing neighbours and the sovereign powers of Europe:

> So Holland with us had the mastery tried,
> And our next neighbours, France and Flanders, ride (ll. 395–6)

According to Smith, in this analogy 'Holland is the masterful wife, England the beaten husband, France and Flanders the neighbours.[22] However, for the analogy to hold, justice would require that France and Flanders have no more interest in the dispute than the wish to uphold the community's norms. In fact, each of them is more directly implicated in the power-play. Jermyn, in his negotiations with France, will shortly be ordered 'To play for Flanders and the stake to lose' (l. 368). I have argued elsewhere that, while the Dutch are fairly portrayed in *The Last Instructions* as having acted perfidiously, the behaviour of the French is greatly more culpable and the English court tends to copy France more closely than it does the Netherlands when it comes to bad faith. The Dutch, while certainly not blameless, are the nearest thing to an innocent party in the proceedings.[23] Certainly, France cannot claim to be impartial.

Line 396 is not easy to reconcile with an interpretation that sees the international political situation as conforming to the pattern of the Skimmington Ride. According to the description that Marvell has just given of

[21] I develop this argument in Kavanagh, 'Andrew Marvell's Ambivalence about Justice', pp. 68–9.

[22] *Poems of Andrew Marvell*, p. 378, note to l. 396.

[23] Kavanagh, 'Andrew Marvell's Ambivalence about Justice', p. 111.

the punishment, it is the couple who fail to observe established gender roles who are supposed to 'ride' on the decrepit horse. It is conceivable that he is using an implied ellipsis to suggest that 'our next neighbours, France and Flanders, [force us to] ride' but given the less than impartial role of those 'next neighbours' it would probably be a mistake to attempt to explain away the apparent confusion as to the nature of their participation. And the confusion is compounded when St Albans is instructed to complain to Louis

> How yet the Hollanders do make a noise,
> Threaten to beat us, and are naughty boys (ll. 429–30)

The threats to beat 'us' are clearly consistent with casting the Dutch in the role of a masculine wife; however the description of them as naughty and noisy boys seems to place them equally in the position of jeering neighbours. In the international version of the Skimmington Ride, the powers of Europe seem to have trouble keeping to their assigned parts.

Such confusion as to their proper roles, combined with the evident self-interest of some of the parties imposing the punishment, warn us that we should be wary of taking entirely at face value Marvell's characterisation of the practice as 'Better than law'. Indeed, lines 377–8 may afford us another example of Marvell's slippery syntax: on the face of it, it is the wives' masculinity that constitutes the transgression of nature's law, but might it not equally be the invention of the punishment? There is evidence that Marvell was suspicious of informal or untried procedures for dealing with alleged wrongdoing, where the risk of a breach of natural justice is particularly great. He was critical of the Commons for proceeding 'Summarily within themselves' against Buckingham instead of impeaching him,[24] partly because impeachment would have meant a hearing before a different body (the Lords) from the one making the complaint (the Commons). His opposition to the impeachment of Clarendon, whom he excoriated in the *Painter* poems, has not been fully explained but it is telling that he drew a parallel between Clarendon's case and Buckingham's, while warning against any 'sudden' move by the Commons against the former.[25] He further condemned

[24] *Prose Works of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Annabel Patterson and others, 2 vols. (New Haven, 2004), ii. 275.

[25] Nigel Smith, *Andrew Marvell: The Chameleon* (New Haven, 2010), p. 208; von Maltzahn, *An Andrew Marvell Chronology*, pp. 99–100 and Hirst and Zwicker, *The Orphan of the Hurricane*, p. 155.

the punishment of Buckingham, Shaftesbury, Wharton and Salisbury as an unprecedented 'Imprisonment without Example' (*Prose Works*, ii. 297).

The 'female Stuart' motif noted by Farley-Hills is similarly present in Marvell's treatment of the capture of the *Royal Charles*. He makes full use of the facts that the pronouns traditionally applied to ships are feminine and that the Dutch prize bears the same name as the monarch:

> The pleasing sight he [De Ruyter] often does prolong:
> Her masts erect, tough cordage, timbers strong,
> ...
> The seamen search her all within, without:
> Viewing her strength, they yet their conquest doubt;
> Then with rude shouts, secure, the air they vex,
> With gamesome joy insulting on her decks (ll. 727–8, 731–4)

The gender elision in this passage could hardly be more complete. The vessel with the king's name has properties which are 'erect', 'tough' and 'strong'. Despite 'her strength', she is conquered and searched 'within' as well as without.[26] The anguish exhibited in the implied comparison of the national humiliation with a sexual assault is tempered by a sense that the humiliation of king and his advisers is even greater – and there is a clear implication that they have been asking for it.

It may be that the focus adopted by Hirst and Zwicker, who write about Marvell's being caught up in 'the toils of patriarchy', could usefully be narrowed to concentrate on the toils, more specifically, of *masculinity*. According to Hirst and Zwicker:

> The enduring political circumstance within which Marvell was situated was ... patriarchy; his enduring social circumstance – orphan and isolate, tutor and landless politician – was dependency. His enduring condition as a writer was at once to yearn for the shelter, and to feel the oppressions, of patriarchy and dependency alike.[27]

[26] See Barbara Riebling, 'England Deflowered and Unmanned: The Sexual Image of Politics in Marvell's "Last Instructions"', *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* , 35 (1995), 137–57: 149.

[27] Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker, 'Andrew Marvell and the Toils of Patriarchy: Fatherhood, Longing and the Body Politic', *ELH: English Literary History* 66 (1999), 629–54: 631.

If patriarchy affords *oppressive shelter* to those under its 'cruel care' ('The Unfortunate Lover', l. 29), an analogous claim might be made about masculinity: it is a quality that can appear as simultaneously a protection and a threat. It offers to protect us by announcing to the world at large that we are strong, brave, willing to defend ourselves when necessary and that what we may lack in combat skills will be made up in ferocity and determination. On the other hand, this very proclamation of our preparedness to fight may lead us into situations where we shall be required to prove it, particularly as we are likely to find that our vaunted masculinity brings us into association with other men who are just as busily vaunting theirs. Hirst and Zwicker do not have that quite in mind: for them, the oppression that comes with patriarchy in no way lessens the shelter it provides; rather, it can be seen as the high price one pays, in much the same way as the Hobbesian social contractor signs away autonomy in return for the prospect of security. The bargain involved in masculinity is more akin to a gamble: we may accept the odds that we shall be safer if we adopt attitudes and characteristics of strength and aggression but, unless we are fools, we are aware of the risk that the bet will go the other way. When it does, masculinity becomes an example of Carey's 'self-defeating reversibility'. 'Force does not establish power; it establishes, simply, the need to use force', he tells us.[28] In much the same way, chest-thumping does not necessarily keep us safe; it may merely mean that we need to thump our chests even harder, if we wish to avoid having someone else do it for us.[29]

It would not be surprising, then, if masculinity had appeared to Marvell, as it appears to many men, in a dual character, at once reassuring and repellant. A case can be made that femininity likewise appears to be double and self-contradictory, though not for precisely corresponding reasons. In 'The Gallery', it may well be retorted, femininity shows itself not so much dual as multiform. It remains true, however, that the successive portrayals fall alternately into one of two broader categories: the alluring and the threatening. Although the speaker introduces only one image at a time, the inevitability of the passage to the next means that a threat always lies behind the allure. The final stanza's portrait seems relatively artless and less affected than the

[28] Carey, 'Reversals Transposed', p. 147.

[29] This does not, of course, purport to be a comprehensive account of masculinity. See Diane Purkiss, 'Thinking of Gender', in Derek Hirst and Steven N. Zwicker (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell*, (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 68–86 (pp. 80–1) for another reason why a Renaissance writer might have been uncomfortable in a masculine role.

others but it is no more authentic on that account. Furthermore, though it is the last to be shown, it comes first in time: it represents 'the same posture, and the look ... with which I first was took' (ll. 51–2). Chronologically, attraction comes before danger; in terms of importance the precedence is reversed.

It is therefore tempting to conclude that the latter is the reality, the former the disguise, and that the lyric should be read as a warning against the concealed trap of female attractiveness. As against this, *each* of the various portraits which comprise the gallery is a 'posture'; and the postures are so extreme that they can only be exaggerations: witch or homicidal torturer on the one hand, goddess on the other. Clora has never actually raved over her lover's entrails in a cave, any more than she has floated on the sea in a huge shell. Though less extreme, even the 'tender shepherdess', a staple of pastoral, is an obviously fictional figure. None of the pictures is a close representation of reality, which is surely something quite different and may be unknowably so. It is not a long step from this to the recognition that femininity (in its diverse forms) is itself a series of assumed postures – nor from that to the idea that the same might be true of masculinity.

Marvell again engages in the detachment of a masculine role from a male and of a feminine one from a female in 'Clorinda and Damon'. The *carpe diem* motif is usually encountered in the univocal utterance of a male persona, the woman's voice remaining unheard. 'Clorinda and Damon' (note that the young woman's name comes first in the title, in contrast to 'Ametas and Thestylis', 'Daphnis and Chloe' or 'Thyrsis and Dorinda') is a dialogue in which it is Clorinda who urges her companion to 'Seize the short joys then, ere they vade' (l. 8). Because only one voice speaks in Herrick's 'Gather Ye Rosebuds' or, indeed, in 'To His Coy Mistress', the reader is left with no clear sense of the effect which the attempt at persuasion has had on its addressee. Success or failure, this might imply, is not really the point. In Marvell's dialogue, on the other hand, we do learn the result: Clorinda, far from having things her way, is instead won over to Damon's point of view.

One remarkable feature of Damon's assumption of the more usually feminine role is that it is accomplished without a sense of absurdity or any obvious element of travesty. The Moncks are a formidable couple who are undoubtedly to be taken seriously but their presentation (in two distinct but thematically related poems) as a ferocious but powerless male tigress and a truth-speaking, immodest female monkey must hold them up to some degree of ridicule, even if the ridicule is tempered by the urgency of the

predicaments in which they are presented to us. Damon, in contrast, does not appear ridiculous: an explanation of his unexpected behaviour is provided by its narrative context:

> D. These once had been enticing things,
> Clorinda, pastures, caves, and springs.
> C. And what late change? D. The other day
> Pan met me. (ll. 17–20)

Clorinda quickly changes her approach. Initially, her focus is still on Damon –'Sweet must Pan sound in Damon's note' (l. 24) – suggesting that she still has hopes of seduction but is sharp enough to recognise that a direct assault on the convert's new beliefs will probably not succeed. No doubt many male wooers, confronted with an ostensibly unshakeable 'virtue' grounded in religious fervour, have adopted a similar strategy. Though Clorinda joins Damon in singing Pan's praises, it is not clear that in doing so she relinquishes her masculine role.

It is certainly arguable that the effect of this exercise in role reversal was to reinforce patriarchal order rather than to explore its weaknesses. It is quite possible that, in the poet's eyes, the young shepherd who leads his companion towards the new religion is fulfilling the proper role of his sex, even as he avoids the corresponding gender position. But if this is true, it remains the case that, in 'Clorinda and Damon', Marvell has shown us the partial separation of the masculine and the feminine from male and female respectively, and done so in a way that does not expose his protagonists to ridicule. Whatever may be said about the 'Masculine wives' of the Skimmington Ride, neither the shepherd nor his companion is 'transgressing Nature's law'.

Nor can 'the laws' ('Daphnis and Chloe', l. 107) according to which two would-be lovers attempt to order their behaviour be said to be those of nature. Daphnis's 'manly stubbornness' (l. 70) is revealed to be a formal role he adopts for only so long as it does not interfere with his usual pastimes (stanza XXVI). According to the narrator, Chloe has been thwarted by 'Nature, her own sex's foe' (l. 5) but few readers will think her worse off for having missed her fleeting opportunity with Daphnis. Although this poem's final line is a question about the reason for Chloe's behaviour, its central puzzle concerns Daphnis's. In this, it forms a pair with 'Mourning', which treats Chlora's tears of ('supposed', l. 36 – but not necessarily or always simulated) grief as a phenomenon to be carefully and subtly interpreted. While

one poem anatomises a rigid masculine insistence on rules of behaviour which, though strict, have nothing to do with morality, the other expatiates on the unfathomable nature of feminine weeping.

Onias IV was a Jewish high priest who was forced to flee to Alexandria to avoid having his skull crushed by his fellow priests. He had been tricked by his older brother, Shimei, into believing that a gown and woman's girdle were the priestly vestments that he was supposed to wear. When he officiated in these garments, his brother told the other priests that Onias had promised his beloved: 'On the day in which I will assume the office of high priest, I will put on your gown and gird myself with your girdle.' In *The Rehearsal Transpros'd: The Second Part*, Marvell compares Samuel Parker to Onias, to the former's disadvantage. Marvell accuses Parker of employing in his works a language which indicates that he has

> forgot not only all Scripture rules, but even all Scripture expressions, unless where he either distorts them to his own interpretation, or attempts to make them ridiculous to others. Insomuch that, of all the Books that ever I read, I must needs say I never saw a Divine guilty of such ribaldry and prophaneness. (*Prose Works*, i. 245–6)

The point of the comparison is that Parker has clothed his arguments in a language which is appropriate to their, as Marvell sees it, irreligious nature but which is entirely out of place in the discourse of a divine. Parker's work is 'so uncanonical and impious, that it would bear an higher and more deserved accusation than that of Onias ... for officiating in a Womans Zone instead of the Priestly girdle, and for the sacred Pectoral wearing his Mistresses Stomacher' (*Prose Works*, i. 246). Marvell chose this obscure analogy in the context of his argument with Parker about zealotry. He had objected to Parker's claim that, in clearing the moneylenders from the temple, Jesus had acted as a zealot. Jason Rosenblatt has shown that, in this argument, Marvell had contrived to appear more erudite than he was.[30] Both parties relied on the work of John Selden, but Rosenblatt makes it clear that Parker was more familiar with it than was Marvell. The story of Onias is to be found in Babylonian Talmud Tractate *Menachot* 109b. However, according to Rosenblatt (*Renaissance England's Chief Rabbi*, p. 128), Marvell 'has taken

[30] Jason P. Rosenblatt, *Renaissance England's Chief Rabbi: John Selden* (Oxford, 2006), Chapter 5, especially at pages 127–8.

the story without acknowledgement not from the Talmud but from Selden's *De Successione in Pontificatum Ebraeorum* (1636)'.

Whatever the merits of Marvell's argument about zealotry, he clearly presents a striking image of a priest carrying out his sacred duties in feminine dress. So effective is the image that the reader is forced to remind him- or herself that Parker is being taxed with clothing merely his public pronouncements – not his person – in a blasphemously impermissible garb. That Marvell should choose to present his readership with such an image is worth remarking, even if any explanation that might be canvassed must necessary be conjectural. Discussing another passage from *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, in which Marvell has referred to Parker's forcing nonconformists to 'run the *Ganteloop*' Hammond writes:

> What starts as a purely symbolic subjection to the verger's wand of office has by the end of the sentence become a literal (and explicitly visualized) physical punishment. ... to Leigh this flight of fancy seemed evidence of Marvell's personal predilections ...[31]

Something similar could be said of the image of Parker (figuratively) clad in his mistress's stomacher. (At least, we must assume that the stomacher was not an actual garment worn by the archdeacon. One conceivable explanation among several is that Marvell was engaging in a form of innuendo in which he put forward a literal accusation in the guise of a metaphorical one. His references to Clarendon's 'rupture' (*Second Advice*, ll. 117–8 and *Last Instructions*, ll. 473–4), seem to disguise the literal as the figurative. If he is doing something analogous in this instance, the motive might be to deter Parker from an escalation of hostilities.) At any rate, it is significant that Marvell was again prepared to risk inviting the inference that his attack on Parker was actually a betrayal of his own predilections even after Leigh had turned the Ganteloop passage against him.

Marvell's imagination led him to puzzle over and test the categories of masculine and feminine (both in comparison and contradistinction to the neuter) considering the possibility that they might both be 'postures' adopted to protect (in their different ways) the self from threat and danger. If the price of that protection is the submission to certain constraints on one's behaviour, we should not be justified in concluding on that account

[31] 'Marvell's Sexuality', p. 93.

that the postures are 'merely' social constructs, falling on the inessential side of a postulated nature-nurture divide. If the term 'natural' has any proper application, it must cover the strategies we adopt to shield ourselves from those risks to which we believe ourselves susceptible.[32] To say so is not to assert that the posture best calculated to offer protection will be the same in all circumstances or to deny that it is liable to show signs of instability. Facing death, neither Douglas nor Villiers could be afforded any more protection by a show of masculinity than each derived from his very obvious courage.

[32]Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: Their Origin and Development* (Cambridge, 1979).