Andrew Marvell is the most enigmatic of English writers. Aubrey tells us that he was merry and cherry-cheeked, but that he would not drink in company, keeping, nevertheless, some bottles of wine in his lodgings 'to refresh his spirits and exalt his muse'. Nearly all the poems on which his fame depends were not published until after his death, and, if they circulated in manuscript during his lifetime, they made nothing like the impression that Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* did. Even when they were published posthumously in 1681, Marvell's poetry met, as far as we can tell, with indifference. The fact that so many extant copies of the folio lack the portrait suggests that interest in Marvell was confined to the political figure and not the poet.

Marvell's lyrics are as nearly anonymous as lyric poetry can be, despite their imaginative and intellectual brilliance. I get no sense in Marvell of that debonair ostentation of personality found in Donne, or the intimate meditative voice of Herbert, or the naughty whimsicality of Herrick, or the suave courtliness of Carew. Even in the political poems there is scarcely a trace of that social tone which Dryden was making a *sine qua non* of the genre. Oddly enough, the closest Marvell comes to an expression of personal feeling is in his formal tributes to Cromwell: *The First Anniversary* and *Upon the Death of the Lord Protector*. The solicitude and grief which they express may, indeed, correspond to the indignation that fuels his post-Restoration satires in verse and prose.

I suggest then an anomaly: that Marvell's lyrics are impersonal and that personal feelings come out only when he is engaged in vital public matters, and from this I would draw the conclusion that Marvell was the least egotistical of poets and one of the most passionately patriotic. For him, as well as for Dryden, the British constitution was the Ark, which is death to touch, however differently they may have construed constitutional fundamentals.

Like many others whom Marvell has fascinated, I have tried over the years to make connections between the superlative lyric poet, the diplomat, the associate of Fairfax and Cromwell, the friend and defender of Milton, the Foreign Office Secretary, the indefatigable M.P. sometimes rebuked for disorderly behaviour in the House, the clandestine agent of a pro-Dutch fifth column, the often boisterous, not to say obscene, satirist, and the beleaguered defender of Britain's freedom. I have even tried to trace an evolutionary process from the lyrics to the poems on affairs of state, from retirement to
Fig. 1. Andrew Marvell, c. 1660.

(Reproduced by courtesy of the Kingston upon Hull City Museums and Art Galleries)
action, but I must confess that what I took for process may simply have been a change of
occupation.

Faced with Marvell’s anonymousness and his extraordinary career, I am struck with
two salient aspects of his character: his versatility (sometimes construed wrongly as
inconstancy) and his devotion to truth. His versatility was exemplified by the splendid
Marvell exhibition in the British Library; his devotion to truth, as I shall try to show,
entails a profound and sensitive awareness of the claims of the ideal and the possible, of
innocence and experience.

Even the most casual reader of English poetry is likely to remember two poems by
Marvell: *To his Coy Mistress* and *The Garden*. Among the best-known lyrics of the
seventeenth century—certainly the most intensively criticized and interpreted in our
era—these two poems are the best of their kinds. *To his Coy Mistress* is the outstanding
poem dealing with the persuasion to love; *The Garden* is pre-eminent among a host of
poems exploring the delights of rural retirement and contemplation. While one celebrates
disengagement from the pressures of the moment, the other proposes the most intense
surrender to them imaginable.

Marvell’s achievement in these two contrasting modes raises an obvious but important
question: is there any significant connection between the pastoral evocation of asexual,
vegetable tranquillity and the urgent invitation to engage in a moment of sexual ecstasy?
Faced with contrary positions such as, ‘Two Paradises ’twere in one / To live in Paradise
alone’ and

Let us roll all our Strength, and all
Our sweetness, up into one Ball:
And tear our Pleasures with rough strife,
Thorough the Iron gates of Life.

must we conclude that Marvell, like the Milton of *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, was
exhibiting his skill at writing on either side of a question?

If we look at them side by side, each poem develops its argument in a way antithetical to
the other. *The Garden* begins with a rejection of the hectic temporal pace of the world:

How vainly men themselves amaze
To win the Palm, the Oke, or Bayes;
And their incessant Labours see
Crown’d from some single Herb or Tree, . . .
While all Flow’rs and all Trees do close
To weave the Garlands of repose.

It proceeds, through hyperbolic celebrations of vegetable love, to a serene vision of the
soul’s ecstasy:

Here at the Fountains sliding foot,
Or at some Fruit-tree’s mossy root,
Casting the Bodies Vest aside,
My Soul into the boughs does glide:
There like a Bird it sits, and sings,  
Then whets, and combs its silver Wings;  
And, till prepar'd for longer flight,  
Waves in its Plumes the various Light.

Conversely, the lover in *To his Coy Mistress* begins by imagining an infinitude of time and space in which he might conduct his courtship at just such a leisurely pace:

- Had we but World enough, and Time,  
- This coyness Lady were no crime.  
- We would sit down, and think which way  
- To walk, and pass our long Loves Day.  
- Thou by the *Indian Ganges* side  
- Should'st Rubies find: I by the Tide  
- Of *Humber* would complain. I would  
- Love you ten years before the Flood:  
- And you should, if you please, refuse  
- Till the Conversion of the *Jews*.  
- My vegetable Love should grow  
- Vaster than Empires, and more slow.

Such ‘World enough, and Time’ can exist, however, only in fantasy. In fact, all the lovers can anticipate at the end of their brief lives is ‘Deserts of vast Eternity’. Better, then, to seize the moment and make up by intensity for the imagined extension in time and space which mortality denies them:

- Thus, though we cannot make our Sun  
- Stand still, yet we will make him run.

The predatory and incontinent lovers at the end of the poem embody the single-minded concentration on the satisfactions of the moment that resembles the ‘unceissant Labours’ of the worldlings in *The Garden*.

Both poems, then, confront unbridled human aspirations with temporal realities in pursuit of a qualified fulfilment. In both the innocence (or *naïveté*) of unlimited hope is corrected by the severely limited view of experience. Both poems lead us through a process by which the vanity of human wishes is exposed to the facts of mortal life.

If there is a common theme running through the best of Marvell’s lyric poems it is the reconciliation of the opposing claims of innocence and experience. The eye of innocence is single, a virtue to be sure, but also a shortcoming. Experience, on the other hand, is afflicted by ambiguity, something close to the ‘vain Head, and double Heart’ of *A Dialogue between the Soul and Body*. Innocence produces the unison and melody of *Bermudas*, experience the harmony of discords celebrated in *Musicks Empire*. Innocence is often satisfied with its condition, even to the point of sounding a little smug, like the Resolved Soul rejecting the temptations of Created Pleasure:

- A Soul that knowes not to presume  
- Is Heaven’s and its own perfume.
Experience, on the other hand, is restless and dissatisfied, like the Body in *A Dialogue between the Soul and Body*:

> What but a Soul could have the wit  
> To build me up for Sin so fit?

The contentment of innocence derives from self-containment, like the Soul in *On a Drop of Dew*, which

> Round in its self incloses:  
> And in its little Globes Extent,  
> Frames as it can its native Element.

Experience, however, is riven by inner conflict, like the speaker in *The Coronet*, who is dismayed to find, intertwined in the garland he has woven for his Saviour, ‘wreaths of Fame and Interest’.

If the contending claims of innocence and experience are found at the heart of Marvell’s best poems, we scarcely need to be reminded that the issues are fundamental to the human condition, however divertingly they may sometimes be treated. Nor need we be reminded, thanks to Cleanth Brooks, that wit can be compatible with high seriousness. What is at stake in Marvell is the need to harmonize the idealism of innocence with the awareness of reality characteristic of experience.

The more intense and discriminating the dialectic of thought and feeling on both sides, the more intense the reader’s response. With this in mind we can dismiss from our discussion a handful of poems which fail to develop much dialectical intensity, those celebrating a more or less tranquil innocence, such as *A Dialogue between the Resolved Soul, and Created Pleasure, On a Drop of Dew*, and *Bermudas*, and such cynical, libertine poems as *Thyrsis and Dorinda* and *Mourning*.

Assuming that Marvell’s most interesting poems are those which combine the most exquisite balance between contending forces with the maximum of imaginative power, we might first consider poems where the balance of power is relatively uneven.

One such is *The Coronet*, Marvell’s most Herbert-like poem, which explores the labyrinthine divergences of the will as it seeks to contrive a tribute to the divine only to discover that the proffered coronet is a hopeless tangle of vanity and self-interest. Deliverance can come only through a self-annihilating submission to Christ:

> But thou who only could’st the Serpent tame,  
> Either his slipp’ry knots at once untie,  
> And disintangle all his winding Snare:  
> Or shatter too with him my curious frame:

When inextricable confusion of motives confronts the absolute of redeeming Grace there is no contest, and yet the poem remains as a brilliant memorial to its creation and rejection.

More painful is the dilemma in *Upon Appleton House*, where, in a quest for lost
Paradise, Marvell, at first sight, appears to undergo the contemplative retirement of *The Garden*:

> But I, retiring from the Flood,
> Take Sanctuary in the Wood;
> And, while it lasts, my self imbark
> In this yet green, yet growing Ark;

Yet the nature in which he seeks lost innocence is disturbingly ambiguous. There is an oak ‘tainted’ by the ‘Traitor-Worm, within it bred’, and the security he hopes to find suggests a labyrinthine enthralment:

> The Oak-Leaves me embroyder all,
> Between which Caterpillars crawl:
> And Ivy, with familiar trails,
> Me licks, and clasps, and curles, and hales.

In pursuing an ecstatic liberation of the spirit, as in *The Garden*, he seems to have consigned himself to a hedonistic bondage touched with masochism:

> Bind me ye Woodbines in your twines,
> Curle me about ye gadding Vines,
> And Oh so close your Circles lace,
> That I may never leave this Place:
> But, lest your Fetters prove too weak,
> Ere I your Silken Bondage break,
> Do you, O Brambles, chain me too,
> And courteous Briars nail me through.

Clearly this is a travesty of contemplative retirement, with solipsism masquerading as spiritual reflection and narcissism disguised as self-discovery. The situation is reflected in the description of the flooded River Wharfe, which runs through the meadows below Appleton House:

> ... a Chrysal Mironr slick;
> Where all things gaze themselves, and doubt
> If they be in it or without.
> And for his shade which therein shines,
> Narcissus like, the Sun too pines.

Having projected its egotism on the sun, the infatuated ego returns to contemplating its own histrionics:

> Oh what a Pleasure ’tis to hedge
> My Temples here with heavy sedge;
> Abandoning my lazy Side,
> Stretcht as a Bank unto the Tide;

Abandoned to the idleness of a piscatory eclogue, ‘While at my Lines the Fishes twang!’, Marvell is disconcerted by the advent of the young Maria Fairfax, heir to Appleton
House and its genius loci. Her untainted innocence has the power to put an end to the dizzying metamorphoses we have witnessed, for

But by her Flames, in Heaven try'd,
Nature is wholly vitrifi'd.

Maria's eye is single, she can distinguish 'within' and 'without' and restore her tutor's power of discrimination. In celebrating her dedication to a public career in service to 'some universal good', Marvell may also have been bidding farewell to the private and self-reflective themes with which his lyric poems had been concerned. With subject and object, 'within' and 'without' restored to their proper places, the poem seems to arrive at a point of view that sees a loss of innocence in a retirement too long protracted at a time when public responsibilities beckon. The usual association of innocence with retirement and experience with involvement in affairs is now reversed, and the poet seems to be anticipating the commitment to public service from which he never turned back. For the remainder of his life, as a Foreign Secretary under Cromwell, as M.P. for Hull, as secretary to the Earl of Carlyle on a mission to Moscow, and as political pamphleteer and satirist, he was to compile the record as a patriot which, for two and a half centuries, overshadowed his achievement as a lyric poet.

From the perspective of Upon Appleton House with its resolution of the claims of retirement and involvement in favour of the latter, we can look back on a group of pastoral poems where the conflict of innocence and experience seems to result in a deadlock. Marvell's 'mower' poems are recognized as a sort of subspecies of pastoral, with the mower taking the place of the traditional shepherd. The substitution of a mower for a shepherd may seem an insignificant one unless we see that the pastoral innocence of the shepherd gives way to a more qualified innocence in the mower. The shepherd, at least according to the convention, pursues the most passive of occupations, but the mower is active and aggressive, and the fact that he cuts down the grass, that ubiquitous green emblem of hope in Marvell, makes him a more complicated figure in the pastoral landscape. He may be more complex, but he is also naive:

My Mind was once the true survey
Of all these Medows fresh and gay;
And in the greenness of the Grass
Did see its Hopes as in a Glass;
When Juliana came, and She
What I do to the Grass, does to my Thoughts and Me.

The haunting refrain, in which the mower associates his occupation with Juliana's devastation of his hopes, implies a link between loss of innocence and the mower's task. The blessed leisure of the pastoral shepherd has given way to the cursed labour of fallen man. Of this connection the mower is clearly unaware: he can only juxtapose what he does to the grass and what Juliana does to him.
In *Damon the Mower* the transformation from innocence to experience is made more explicit:

Heark how the Mower *Damon* Sung,
With love of *Juliana* stung!
While ev'ry thing did seem to paint
The Scene more fit for his complaint.
Like her fair Eyes the day was fair;
But scorching like his am'rous Care.
Sharp like his Sythe his Sorrow was,
And wither'd like his Hopes the Grass.

In the grass withered like Damon's hopes Marvell has modified the pastoral convention. Exiled from a fictional world devoted to idyllic love, the mower is baffled by unrequited passion, while Juliana, a figment of that world, is conditioned by its conventions to respond only to the overtures of shepherds. Marvell's mower, who has blundered into the pastoral world, is thus the victim of generic specialization. Presumably, Juliana cannot even hear his song. She is on another wavelength, as it were.

Doomed to an isolation unwittingly created by his occupation, Damon can only direct his frustrated passion at 'Depopulating all the Ground'. Unrequited love drives him to genocide, but that brings no relief, and his passion is finally and inevitably turned upon himself:

The edged Stele by careless chance
Did into his own Ankle glance;
And there among the Grass fell down,
By his own Sythe, the Mower mown.

In Marvell's vegetable world those who live by the scythe perish by the scythe, as Damon realizes in a final epiphany:

Only for him no Cure is found,
Whom *Juliana's* Eyes do wound.
'Tis death alone that this must do:
For Death thou art a Mower too.

In *The Mower to the Glo-Worms* Damon moves a little further along the line from innocence to experience. He begins by evoking poignantly an earlier state in which he seemed to live in harmony with nature and ends with a recognition of the hopeless disorientation and alienation which Juliana has brought into his life:

Ye living Lamps, by whose dear light
The Nightingale does sit so late,
And studying all the Summer-night,
Her matchless Songs does meditate;
Ye Country Comets, that portend
No War, nor Princes funeral,
Shining unto no higher end
Than to presage the Grasses fall;

Ye Glo-worms, whose officious Flame
To wandering Mowers shows the way,
That in the Night have lost their aim,
And after foolish Fires do stray;

Your courteous Lights in vain you waste,
Since Juliana here is come,
For she my Mind hath so displace'd
That I shall never find my home.

As a solitary reaper in a pastoral world Damon has no choice but to submit to his homelessness.

Given the narrow limits of the genre and the limited awareness of the naïve mower, these poems strike a delicate balance between the poles of innocence and experience.

A quite different treatment of the same themes is to be found in The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Faun. Unlike the terse Damon, the Nymph responds to the withering of her hopes with a flood of mannerist conceits reminiscent of Crashaw. This poem won the heart of Edgar Allan Poe: 'How truthful an air of deep lamentation hangs here upon every gentle syllable! It pervades all. It comes over the sweet melody of the words, over the gentleness and grace which we fancy in the little maiden herself, even over the half-playful, half-petulant air with which she lingers on the beauties and good qualities of her favorite—like the cool shadow of a summer cloud over a bed of lilies and violets'. This fatuous rhapsody, which appeared in the Southern Literary Messenger for August 1836, may suggest some reasons why Marvell's poetry had to wait so long for proper appreciation. Certainly, if The Nymph Complaining were as Poe saw it, it would never have received the extensive and distinguished attention that later critics have given it. Poe failed to see that the naïve effusions of the little maiden are qualified both by her own hyperbole and by Marvell's sympathetic but also ironic awareness of the implications of her reaction to the events she deplores. A critic who construes the poem as an allegory of the Crucifixion also misses the qualifications of irony. No doubt, as others have suggested, the poem does allude to the Song of Songs and to Ascanius's slaying of Sylvia's faun in Aeneid vii, but it is to be understood in its own terms. It is essential to keep in mind that it presents the emotional, intellectual, and imaginative process by which the innocent nymph tries to deal with a devastating experience. Process is affirmed in the title, which is not The Nymph's Complaint but The Nymph's Complaining. Unlike Marvell's other poems of loss of innocence, where the point of view is retrospective, this elegy—
the opening and closing sections, at any rate—moves in time with the nymph’s experience of the faun’s dying:

O help! O help! I see it faint:
And dye as calmly as a Saint.
See how it weeps. The Tears do come
Sad, slowly dropping like a Gumme.
So weeps the wounded Balsome: so
The holy Frankincense doth flow.
The brotherless Heliades
Melt in such Amber Tears as these.

The slow movement of the verse is part of another process of transformation, in the course of which tears and drops of blood, like gum and frankincense, are gradually congealed into the immobility of art, represented by the statues of faun and nymph which the nymph finally imagines at the end of the poem. In addition to this retardation of process we find a growing aesthetic distance between the event and the nymph’s response to it in her elegantly learned reference to Phaeton’s sisters as ‘The brotherless Heliades’. The nymph is not as naive as she makes herself out to be, and there is even a suggestion in this transformation of personal experience into myth, that she derives some pleasure from her skill as artist. The poem implies then that the price of art is the loss of innocence, or at least the gaining of a wider awareness.

Marvell is the least sentimental of English poets. His awareness, in Eliot’s famous phrase, ‘involves, probably, a recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience, of other kinds of experience which are possible’. A striking appreciation of this quality is found in Hemingway’s allusion to Marvell in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). On the eve of his departure for what turns out to be the rout of the allied forces at Caporetto, Lt. Henry and Catherine Barclay are spending the night at a hotel in Milan:

The waiter came and took away the things. After a while we were very still and we could hear the rain. Down below on the street a motor car honked.

‘But at my back I always hear
Times winged chariot hurrying near.’

I said.

‘I know the poem’ Catherine said. ‘It’s by Marvell. But it’s about a girl who wouldn’t live with a man.’

The sound of the horn evidently sets the train of association going in Lt. Henry’s memory, but the unmentioned link is the allusion in *The Waste Land* to ‘The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring / Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring’. In quoting Marvell’s famous couplet while suppressing Eliot’s desolate version of it Hemingway’s young officer brilliantly exemplifies the ironic complexity of response in Marvell which Eliot had identified in his essay. The innocence of Hemingway’s lovers is thus disturbingly qualified by two voices of experience, that of Marvell’s lover and that of Eliot’s Tiresias.

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Unlike Hemingway, Marvell never pursues the dialectic of innocence and experience to a tragic conclusion. Instead, he usually brings the conflict to some sort of resolution or, at least, to some kind of existential adjustment. Where neither of the parties concerned is capable of concessions there may be a painful but comic deadlock, as in *A Dialogue between the Soul and Body*. Here neither party is capable of recognizing any kind of experience but its own, and the result is utter incompatibility between two balanced sets of paradoxes:

O Who shall, from this Dungeon, raise
A Soul enslav'd so many ways?
With bolts of Bones, that fetter'd stands
In Feet; and manacled in Hands.
Here blinded with an Eye; and there
Deaf with the drumming of an Ear.
A Soul hung up, as 'twere, in Chains
Of Nerves, and Arteries, and Veins.
Tortur'd, besides each other part,
In a vain Head, and double Heart.

O who shall me deliver whole,
From bonds of this Tyrannic Soul?
Which, stretcht upright, impales me so,
That mine own Precipice I go;
And warms and moves this needless Frame:
(A Fever could but do the same.)
And, wanting where its spight to try,
Has made me live to let me dye.
A Body that could never rest,
Since this ill Spirit it possesst.

This witty dilemma prompted some anonymous reader of a Bodleian copy to cross out the last four lines of the poem in which Body complains,

What but a Soul could have the wit
To build me up for Sin so fit?
So Architects do square and hew
Green Trees that in the Forest grew.

In the margin he wrote, 'Desunt multa' (A great deal is missing). I assume that he was perturbed at the idea that Body should have the last word in the exchange.

In *The Definition of Love*, his most metaphysical poem, Marvell goes a step beyond the deadlock of Soul and Body. Here Fate opposes the consummation of a perfect love. Here the contending forces of innocence and experience are deadlocked, but Marvell contrives to make of this seemingly hopeless situation a qualified victory for the forces of innocence and ideal love. The obstacle of Fate or 'Impossibility' paradoxically guarantees the
continuing perfection of love: the Donnean tour de force makes intractable opposition the preservative of the ideal. Frustration becomes a higher virtue than fruition:

My Love is of a birth as rare
As 'tis for object strange and high:
It was begotten by despair
Upon Impossibility.

The tone in which this arcane secret is presented is austere and private. Rarely does Marvell seem to address anyone in particular. He is much more solitary than Donne. His metaphoric terms are often absolute in their abstractness, unqualified by sensuous richness or appeal. The only emotion in the poem is expressed in the contemptuous dismissal of Hope:

Magnanimous Despair alone
Could show me so divine a thing,
Where feeble Hope could ne'er have flown
But vainly flapt its Tinsel Wing.

The impotence of hope finds prosodic expression in the exhausted series of short ɪs: 'its Tinsel Wing', which is contrasted with the sonorous energy of 'Magnanimous Despair alone'. Even more effective is the process by which Hope is rendered hopeless as its feebleness is underscored by the triple rhyme of 'ne'er have flown' with 'Despair alone', while the usual associations of hope are conferred magnanimously upon despair.

Still, the poet continues, he might achieve his object without hope, were it not for Fate:

And yet I quickly might arrive
Where my extended Soul is fixt,
But Fate does Iron wedges drive,
And alwaies crouds it self betwixt.

Having met magnanimous despair and hopeless hope we are not, perhaps, too surprised to encounter a Fate characterized as an anxious, small-minded busybody and something of a spoilsport. The expansive energies of the first two lines are blocked by the obstructive operation of Fate 'croud[ing] it self betwixt', while its envious insecurity becomes explicit in the next stanza:

For Fate with jealous Eye does see
Two perfect Loves; nor lets them close;
Their union would her ruine be,
And her Tyrannick pow'rt depose.

Limitations of vision may be implicit in Fate's single 'Eye'. She has, none the less, good reason to be anxious. Even when held apart by her opposition the polar lovers define the world of love:

And therefore her Decrees of Steel
Us as the distant Poles have plac'd
(Though Loves whole World on us doth wheel)
Not by themselves to be embrac'd.
I don’t think it is over-ingenious to see the parentheses bracketing the line “Though Loves whole World on us doth wheel” as representing the two hemispheres of that world of love which a union of the lovers would destroy. In this magnanimous and self-denying recognition there also seems to be an allusion to Donne’s famous observation that

Dull sublunary lovers’ love  
Whose soul is sense, cannot admit  
Absence, ’cause it doth remove  
Those things which elemented it.

The late J. B. Leishman makes the comparison with Donne’s poem to show that Marvell’s poem is essentially an ingenious series of conceits on the time-honoured theme of impossibility in love. I am inclined to prefer the idea that, having once postulated a perfect love, Marvell then takes the metaphorical commonplaces of the genre, the poles that link and separate the lovers, the microcosm of love, the opposition of fate, and so on, to construct a model that represents so precisely the existential and emotional dilemma of the lover. Innocent aspirations, blocked by Fate, lead to a more sublime innocence tested by experience:

As Lines so Loves oblique may well  
Themselves in every Angle greet:  
But ours so truly Paralel,  
Though infinite can never meet.

The definition ends with a concluding statement as precise and satisfying as the completion of a proposition in geometry:

Therefore the Love which us doth bind,  
But Fate so enviously debarrs,  
Is the Conjunction of the Mind,  
And Opposition of the Stars.

The sublimity of this conclusion is, of course, qualified by the underlying ironic awareness that Fate’s power does not depend on her keeping the lovers apart. Like Donne, Marvell dramatizes the boundless egotism of the lover by hyperbole, but, once we grant him the sublime innocence of his love and the hostility of Fate, the rigorous precision of his definition leads inevitably and satisfyingly to such a conclusion.

Somewhat the same antagonism between innocence and experience, between reality and the ideal, is at the heart of the famous Horatian Ode upon Cromwell’s Return from Ireland. Like most of Marvell’s poems, the Ode was not published during his lifetime, and he wrote it, I believe, in order to come to grips with an extremely difficult political situation. Here was a dilemma which demanded a decision for or against Cromwell. A practical solution to the dilemma must be achieved without sacrificing principle. In his meteoric career seen from the perspective of the summer of 1650 Cromwell had seized the leadership of the Parliamentary forces, captured and executed the king, defeated the Irish, and was about to invade Scotland. The issue, as Marvell defines it, is whether or not a loyal
Englishman can support Cromwell, and it turns on the opposition between the 'helpless Right' represented by the dead Charles I and the overwhelming might of Cromwell:

Though Justice against Fate complain,
And plead the ancient Rights in vain:
But those do hold or break
As Men are strong or weak.
Nature that hateth emptiness,
Allows of penetration less:
And therefore must make room
Where greater Spirits come.

'Certainly', as Professor Wallace says, 'a doctrine of necessity is being employed to counter the cause of justice, but...it may be more accurate to emphasize Marvell's own appeal to a higher justice, embodied not in a constitution but in natural and revealed law.' What is Horatian about Marvell's poem is its scrupulous awareness of what must be said on either side of the question. As in Horace's ode on the defeat of Cleopatra at Actium ('nunc est bibendum'), where the celebration of a Roman victory is qualified by a panegyric of the vanquished queen, Marvell's celebration of Cromwell is heavily qualified by his panegyric on the dead Charles I:

He nothing common did, or mean,
Upon the memorable Scene:
But with his keener Eye
The Axes edge did try:
Nor call'd the Gods with vulgar spight
To vindicate his helpless Right,
But bow'd his comely Head
Down, as upon a Bed.

Yet, the praise of Charles is qualified in turn by the suggestion that his submission, however dignified and courageous, to some extent validated the force to which he submitted, for

This was that memorable Hour
Which first assur'd the forced Pow'r.

Marvell makes this 'memorable Scene' crucial. Before it Cromwell is presented chiefly in terms of power; afterwards he is praised for his justice, knowledge, moderation, and obedience: 'How fit he is to sway / That can so well obey'. But even this commendation is qualified by the lines that lead up to it: 'Nor yet grown stiffer with Command, / But still in the Republick's hand'. After such a tentative and conditional approval of Cromwell as de facto head of state, the remainder of the ode limits itself to anticipating his future victories in foreign wars, an area in which approval need not be qualified. In the concluding apostrophe, however, qualification is implicit:

But thou the Wars and Fortunes Son
March indefatigably on,
And for the last effect
Still keep thy Sword erect:
Besides the force it has to fright
The Spirits of the shady Night;
The same Arts that did gain
A Pow'r must it maintain.

Power won by arts, lacking the endorsement of rights, can only be maintained by ceaseless and indefatigable exertion. Our final view of Cromwell puts him among those pursuers of worldly ambition derided in *The Garden*:

How vainly men themselves amaze
To win the Palm, the Oke, or Bayes;
And their incessant Labours see
Crown'd from some single Herb or Tree,
Whose short and narrow verg'd Shade
Does prudently their Toyles upbraid;

Although the word liberal has now lost its meaning on both sides of the Atlantic and was not a significant term in Marvell’s time, I am inclined to attribute some of his great strength and abiding influence to a liberal imagination and a liberal conscience. His ode on Cromwell always reminds me of E. M. Forster’s *Two Cheers for Democracy*. His career as poet and public servant was marked by independent judgement and a talent for making responsible discriminations. It is not surprising, then, that shortly after writing the *Horatian Ode* he took a position at Appleton House with the Lord General Fairfax who had retired from the leadership of the Parliamentary army because he disapproved of Cromwell’s projected invasion of Scotland. In his sojourn with the Fairfaxs in Yorkshire, tutoring the girl who was so unfortunately to marry Dryden’s Zimri, the dissolute Duke of Buckingham, Marvell probably wrote *The Garden* and other poems on life in the country in addition to a poem in Latin and two in English in honour of his master. *Upon Appleton House* is, among other things, a meditative or contemplative poem of ninety-seven four-square octasyllabic octet stanzas which explores the contending values of the retired life versus the active life. As I have mentioned, Marvell appears to have felt at its conclusion that he had an obligation to emerge from retirement and serve his country. At the end of 1652, with the help of Milton, he applied for the post of assistant Latin Secretary. Instead he became governor of Cromwell’s protégé and prospective son-in-law, William Dutton. The awe and qualified admiration for Cromwell expressed in the *Horatian Ode* seem through this association to have deepened into an affection matched only by his warm relationship to his nephew, Will Popple. Early in 1655 Marvell published *The First Anniversary of the Government under His Highness The Lord Protector*, outstanding among poems on affairs of state for its special blend of political realism and piety. It explores the proposition that Cromwell may be a Heaven-sent ruler and that the power maintained so indefatigably at the end of the *Horatian Ode* might now, God willing, be endorsed by Cromwell’s coronation, a step which the Lord Protector refused to take. In any event,
Marvell’s wisdom in the ways of innocence and experience appears brilliantly in his figurative representation of the ways in which the political opposition may help to sustain the Protectorate. He sees in Cromwell another Amphion, using his instrument (the Instrument of Government, 1653, which established the Protectorate) to produce political harmony:

Such was that wondrous Order and Consent,
When Cromwell tun’d the ruling Instrument;

The response is truly sublime:

None to be sunk in the Foundation bends,
Each in the House the highest Place contends,
And each the Hand that lays him will direct,
And some fall back upon the Architect;
Yet all compos’d by his attractive Song,
Into the Animated City throng.

The magic of this leads to the engineering genius which underlies Marvell’s magnificent and accurate representation of the dynamics of the mixed state:

The Common-wealth does through their Centers all
Draw the Circumference of the publique Wall;
The crossest Spirits here do take their part,
Fast’n ing the Contignation which they thwart;
And they, whose Nature leads them to divide,
Uphold, this one, and that the other Side;
But the most Equall still sustain the Height,
And they as Pillars keep the Work upright;
While the resistance of opposed Minds,
The Fabrique as with Arches stronger binds,
Which on the Basis of a Senate free,
Knit by the Roofs Protecting weight agree.

This has the brilliance and precision of *The Definition of Love* with the addition of gravity. The Protectorate, as Marvell contemplates it, can employ the least erected and most hostile spirits in creating something as close to the heavenly city as can be found on earth.

3 I am indebted to my friend Robert Newman for reminding me of Hemingway’s allusion.  
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