

WARTON LECTURE ON ENGLISH POETRY

SOME THEMES AND VARIATIONS IN THE  
POETRY OF ANDREW MARVELL

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THE small collection of Marvell's pre-Restoration poetry, most of which was probably seen only by a few of his intimate friends and which has reached us almost by accident, is perhaps the most remarkable example we have of the interaction between what Mr. Eliot, in a famous phrase, called Tradition and the Individual Talent. For, although Marvell's poetry is highly original and, at its best, unmistakably his own and no one else's, he is almost always acting upon hints and suggestions provided by earlier poets, and almost never writing entirely, as children would say, out of his own head. When he returned from his foreign travels in (as is probable) 1646, he seems to have bought and read attentively many of those notable volumes of verse by living or recently deceased poets which, from 1640 onwards, appeared in such rapid succession, often from the press of that most enterprising of publishers Humphrey Moseley. Particular borrowings or imitations prove that he had read (I mention them in order of publication) Carew's *Poems* (1640, 1642, 1651), Waller's *Poems* (1645), *The Poems of Mr. John Milton* (1645), Crashaw's *Steps to the Temple* (1646, 1648), Cowley's *The Mistress* (1647), Cleveland's *Poems* (1647 and 1651), Lovelace's *Lucasta* (1649), and Davenant's *Gondibert* (1651). These and other poets, including the Ancients, were continually suggesting to Marvell new and amusing things to do. And how remarkable, considering the comparatively small number of his poems, is their variety! There is something in almost every one of them that recalls some other seventeenth-century poet, and yet perhaps no single one of them is really like a poem by anyone else. Marvell, in fact, is the most representative of all those fine amateur poets of the earlier seventeenth century who wrote mainly for their own pleasure and that of a few friends. It would be going too far to say that whatever any other seventeenth-century poet has done well Marvell has done better. In the art of making the purest poetry out of almost pure abstractions not even Donne has surpassed Marvell's *Definition of Love*, but Marvell

has nothing comparable with that tenderness which is no less characteristic of Donne's poetry than its wit: nothing like

I wonder by my troth, what thou and I  
Did, till we lov'd?

or

All other things, to their destruction draw,  
Only our love hath no decay;

or

So, so, breake off this last lamenting kisse.

Marvell's moralizing *On a Drop of Dew* is no less beautiful than Vaughan's moralizing on *The Water-fall*, but he has nothing comparable with the intense vision of *The World* or the white ecstasy of *The Retreat*. Some of Marvell's descriptions and images have both the colour and the crystalline purity of Crashaw's, but, although he is free from Crashaw's not infrequent mawkishness and sentimentality, he also lacks both Crashaw's child-like tenderness and his rapture. And, although he often equals George Herbert in structure, he has none of his passionate personal drama. Nevertheless, although Marvell cannot equal any of the poets I have mentioned in their special intensities, he can surpass each and all of them in variety and breadth. This is partly because he is, in comparison with them, singularly uncommitted. His poetry is, so to speak, the poetry of a temperament rather than of any urgent personal experience, but of a temperament in which nearly all the most attractive virtues of the earlier seventeenth century seem to be combined.

To attempt to review, with something more than superficiality, all Marvell's most notable poems would be impossible in a single lecture; one would have to take account of so many other seventeenth-century poets and poems that such a 'project' (as our American friends call it) could only be realized in a sizable book, such as that on which I have myself been for several years intermittently engaged. All I am now going to attempt is to suggest something of the ways in which tradition and originality are combined in a few representative poems, with, I hope, not more illustrative detail than can be comfortably assimilated from a spoken discourse.

How did Marvell begin? There are a few commendatory, elegiac, satirical, and political poems, all of them, except the great Cromwell ode, in the heroic couplet, and all of them, except for that ode, of small intrinsic importance, which can be assigned, because of their allusions to public events, to various

dates between 1646 and 1650. When, though, we come to the unpublic, the lyrical, reflective, or descriptive poems, we have almost no external evidence to help us. A recently discovered manuscript proves that the pastoral *Dialogue between Thyrsis and Dorinda* must have been written before September 1645, and therefore probably before Marvell set out on his foreign travels in or about 1642. It is impossible not to suppose that the poems *Upon the Hill and Grove at Bill-borow* and *Upon Appleton House*, both dedicated 'To the Lord Fairfax', and *Musicks Empire*, in which Fairfax is evoked in the last stanza, were written during the two years, 1651 to 1653, which Marvell spent with the retired Lord General at his estate of Nunappleton in Yorkshire, as tutor to his young daughter Mary. And it seems reasonable to suppose that the poem *Bermudas* was written some time after July 1653, when Marvell, together with his pupil, Cromwell's ward William Dutton, began his residence with John Oxenbridge, Fellow of Eton College, who had twice visited those islands. These, I think, are the only private poems for whose dates there is any kind of external evidence. I myself am inclined to believe that nearly all the best of what it seems convenient to call Marvell's private poems were written during those two years at Nunappleton, when he had infinite leisure and the society of a friend and patron who was both a lover of poetry and, in a small way, a poet himself. The affinity between *The Garden* and the poem on Appleton House is obvious, and it is difficult not to associate the predominantly pastoral or descriptive element in many other poems with Marvell's residence at Nunappleton: more important, though, as a common characteristic is that maturity and security which is equally apparent in poems otherwise so different as the Cromwell ode, *The Definition of Love*, *To his Coy Mistress*, *The Picture of Little T.C. in a Prospect of Flowers*, the Mower poems, *On a Drop of Dew*. I need not prolong the list: apart from certain careless amateurishnesses—an excessive use of inversion for the sake of rhyme, and excessive use of expletives such as 'do', 'did', and 'doth' to supply syllables—of which he never rid himself, one feels that in all these poems, and in those which seem to belong with them, Marvell knew exactly what he wanted to say before he began to write, and that in each poem he has completely realized his intention. I myself seem to be aware almost of a difference in kind between their assuredness, their maturity and security, and what, in comparison, seem the uncertainty, inequality, and sometimes laboured ingenuity of six poems which stand rather

apart from the rest. Three of these—*The Match*, *The Unfortunate Lover*, *The Gallery*—are predominantly and sometimes grotesquely emblematical or allegorical, and three of them—*Mourning, Eyes and Tears*, *The Fair Singer*—have a more obvious affinity with certain kinds of Renaissance Latin epigram than we find in Marvell's more characteristic poems. Were these Marvell's earliest surviving poems, his beginnings, or were they simply lapses—experiments, contemporary with the more characteristic poems, of a kind which he decided not to pursue? Three of them, I said, were predominantly allegorical, but then so too is *Musicks Empire*, which must have been written at Nunappleton, since it concludes with a compliment to the Lord General. It is not, indeed, like *The Match* and *The Unfortunate Lover*, grotesquely allegorical, and it contains the unforgettable phrase, a phrase one might have expected to find rather in Rilke than in Marvell, 'Musick, the Mosaique of the Air'; nevertheless, if one examines it carefully, one finds that the correspondence between the literal and the metaphorical (so exquisitely preserved in *On a Drop of Dew*) is continually breaking down.

*On a Drop of Dew*: my parenthetical mention of this, one of Marvell's most perfect poems, may remind us of the fact that, even after he had achieved stylistic assurance, he never lost his taste for allegory in the medieval sense of extended metaphor, for the elaborate comparison or series of comparisons, running through an entire poem, and that this kind of writing is (despite popular notions to the contrary) quite uncharacteristic of Donne. If, then, which is by no means certain, *The Match* and *The Unfortunate Lover*<sup>1</sup> are early poems, they are not like Donne, and Marvell did not begin as a disciple of Donne. It would be more possible to maintain that he began as a disciple of Crashaw and

<sup>1</sup> The first two lines of the last stanza of this poem,

This is the only *Banneret*  
That ever Love created yet,

were certainly suggested, as H. M. Margoliouth indicated in a note, by two lines in the poem *Dialogue—Lucasta, Alexis in Lovelace's Lucasta*, 1649, a volume to which Marvell contributed some commendatory verses:

Love nee're his Standard when his Hoste he sets,  
Creates alone fresh-bleeding *Bannerets*.

*Lucasta* was licensed on 4 February 1647–8, and if ll. 21–32 of Marvell's commendatory verses are taken to mean that the book had not yet been licensed, we may assume that Marvell wrote them at some time *before* that date and *after* his return from his travels in 1646 (see *Poems and Letters*, ed. Margoliouth, i. 216). Is it, though, absolutely necessary to suppose that Marvell had read all the poems in the book before he commended it?

of those neo-Latin epigrammatists whom Crashaw often imitated. Consider for a moment the poem *Eyes and Tears*. It was almost certainly suggested by Crashaw's *The Weeper*, and the fourteen stanzas into which its fifty-six octosyllabic couplets are divided are as loosely connected and as transposable as those of Crashaw's poem, each of them developing, more cerebrally and definingly and less pictorially than Crashaw, some ingenious metaphor or simile to express the superiority of tears to any other terrestrial sight and of sorrow to any other human emotion: laughter turns to tears; the sun, after distilling the world all day, is left with nothing but moisture, which he rains back in pity; stars appear beautiful only as the tears of light, and so on. The eighth stanza,

So *Magdalen*, in Tears more wise  
Dissolved those captivating Eyes,  
Whose liquid Chaines could flowing meet  
To fetter her Redeemers feet,

might almost be regarded as a complimentary allusion to Crashaw's weeping Magdalene, and at the end of his poem Marvell has added a translation of this stanza into Latin elegiacs which would not have been out of place in *Epigrammata Sacra*, the little collection of Latin epigrams on sacred subjects which Crashaw published in 1634. The poem *Mourning*, which, in nine octosyllabic quatrains, attempts to say, by means of ingenious similes and metaphors, what Chlora's tears are, recalls, more immediately than do any of Marvell's more individual and characteristic poems, various things in the enormous and enormously popular collections of Renaissance Latin epigrams. Étienne Pasquier (1529-1615), for example, has a poem entitled *De Amœna Vidua*, 'On Amœna,<sup>1</sup> having lost her husband', which contains the lines:

His tamen in lachrimis nihil est ornatius illa,  
Perpetuusque subest eius in ore nitor.  
Siccine, defunctum quae deperit orba maritum,  
Semper aget viduo fœmina mæsta thoro?  
Quae flet culta, suum non luget, Amœna, maritum;  
Quid facit ergo? alium quaerit Amœna virum.

('Yet, amid these tears, nothing could be handsomer than she, and there lurks a perpetual brightness in her face. Will she, who pines in her bereavement for her dead husband, always be thus enacting the mourner

<sup>1</sup> Pasquier is using the adjective *amœna* ('lovely', 'charming') as a proper noun.

on a widowed bed? One, Amoena, who weeps with elegance is not mourning her husband. What, then, is she doing? Amoena, she's looking for another.')<sup>1</sup>

It was at any rate somewhat in this manner, if not actually with these lines in his memory, that Marvell wrote:

Her Eyes, confus'd and doubled ore  
With Tears suspended ere they flow,  
Seem bending upwards, to restore  
To Heaven, whence it came, their Woe,

When, molding of the watry Sphears,  
Slow drops unty themselves away;  
As if she, with those precious Tears,  
Would strow the ground where *Strephon* lay.

Yet some affirm, pretending Art,  
Her Eyes have so her Bosome drown'd,  
Only to soften near her Heart  
A place to fix another Wound;

And, while vain Pomp does her restrain  
Within her solitary Bowr,  
She courts her self in am'rous Rain,  
Her self both *Danae* and the Showr.

Nay others, bolder, hence esteem  
Joy now so much her Master grown,  
That whatsoever does but seem  
Like Grief, is from her Windows thrown;

Nor that she payes, while she survives,  
To her dead Love this Tribute due,  
But casts abroad these Donatives<sup>2</sup>  
At the installing of a new. . .

I yet my silent Judgment keep,  
Disputing not what they believe:  
But sure as oft as Women weep,  
It is to be suppos'd they grieve.<sup>3</sup>

The cynical notion of grief as something deliberately assumed by a woman in order to increase her attractiveness is the sort of

<sup>1</sup> *Deliciae C[entum] Poetarum Gallorum*, ed. R. Gherus, 1609, ii. 875.

<sup>2</sup> 'A donation, gift, present; *esp.* one given formally or officially, as a largess or bounty' (*O.E.D.*).

<sup>3</sup> I have omitted the first and eighth stanzas and have made various necessary changes in the punctuation.

thing we scarcely find in English poetry before about 1630. Such notions, such 'conceits', had for long been 'thought up' by continental Latin poets, searching for subjects on which they could write wittily and antithetically, but when the English poets at last 'got around' to them, they often, as Marvell has done here, treated them with far greater subtlety and elaboration; and it is this, I suppose, that has led us to acquiesce too readily in the application of the term 'metaphysical' to their development of such conceits. I hasten to assure you that I am not now proposing to argue about that term. Professor Robert Ellrodt of the Sorbonne has recently argued at length, and, on the whole, convincingly, that Donne and George Herbert are the only poets who are metaphysical; if, then, to write metaphysically means to write like Donne, Marvell here is not being metaphysical, for he is certainly not writing like Donne. Also entirely within the tradition of the neo-classical epigram, although—I think one can say it without fearing any accusation of insularity—with characteristically English pre-eminence, is that beautiful poem *The Fair Singer*. Characteristically English, but less individually Marvellian, less unmistakably his own, than are most of Marvell's best poems; for, if none of his contemporaries wrote one quite so good as this, several of them wrote charming epigrammatic poems on similar themes, although, since it is easier to describe sights than sounds, they generally performed some variation on the theme of 'Seeing her Walking' (in the Snow, in the Rain, on the Grass, in the Park, &c.).

I could have fled from One but singly fair:  
 My dis-intangled Soul it self might save,  
 Breaking the curled trammels of her hair.  
 But how should I avoid to be her Slave,  
 Whose subtile Art invisibly can wreath  
 My Fetters of the very Air I breath?

It would not have been at all surprising had Marvell appended a translation of this exquisite second stanza into Latin elegiacs. One recalls (although their wit is of a different and less pleasing kind) the three Latin epigrams *Ad Leonoram Romae canentem* which Milton, during his stay in Rome in the winter of 1638-9, addressed to the famous singer Leonora Baroni. To Donne such a topic would have seemed far too established and conventional, too little of his own choosing and devising, too much of an initial advantage, too much a topic on which some far lesser intellect might conceivably write a not wholly despicable poem.

It was not for the likes of him to be just one more encomiast of some Leonora Baroni.

Is Marvell ever really like Donne? His *Definition of Love*,<sup>1</sup> although its last stanza, almost certainly the germ from which the whole poem sprang, was suggested by the third stanza of a not very good poem in Cowley's *The Mistress* entitled *Impossibilities*—his *Definition of Love* is, as many readers must have felt, more like Donne's *A Valediction: forbidding mourning* than perhaps any other single seventeenth-century poem is like any one of Donne's *Songs and Sonets*: 'like', not as a deliberate and inferior imitation, as are so many of the poems in Cowley's *Mistress*, but like with the likeness of a peer. Certainly, without the example of Donne's *Valediction* I doubt whether Marvell's poem could have been what it is. In what might be called (though I do not much like the phrase) its concrete intellectuality, the way in which it intellectualizes feeling or sensation into conceptions, into more or less abstract ideas, which still retain the vividness of perceptions, the style of Marvell's poem strikingly resembles Donne's; and yet, below the surface, is there not a fundamental difference? Let us place three stanzas from each poem side by side.

Dull sublunary lovers love  
 (Whose soule is sense) cannot admit  
 Absence, because it doth remove  
 Those things which elemented it.

But we by a love, so much refin'd,  
 That our selves know not what it is,  
 Inter-assured of the mind,  
 Care lesse, eyes, lips, and hands to misse.

Our two soules therefore, which are one,  
 Though I must goe, endure not yet  
 A breach, but an expansion,  
 Like gold to ayery thinnesse beate.

Donne, as in nearly all the more serious of the *Songs and Sonets*, is here analysing his immediate experience of a particular situation, real or imagined, and developing the paradox that for true lovers absence is not incompatible with presence. Now listen to Marvell:

<sup>1</sup> In what I have to say about this poem I am greatly indebted to some remarks by Professor R. Ellrodt, *Les Poètes métaphysiques anglais*, première partie, tome ii, 1960, pp. 123 and 148.



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

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,

Unless the giddy Heaven fall,  
 And Earth some new Convulsion tear;  
 And, us to joyn, the World should all  
 Be cramp'd into a *Planisphere*.<sup>1</sup>

Marvell is not starting from the immediate experience of a particular situation, is not really being analytic and psychological and paradoxical like Donne, but is simply performing, with characteristically seventeenth-century intellectuality, ingenuity, hyperbole, and antithesis, an elaborate series of variations on the ancient theme of star-crossed lovers. While Donne, not merely in the stanzas I quoted but throughout his poem, is developing an argument ('Even though physically parted, we can remain spiritually united'), Marvell is simply saying over and over again, in various ingenious ways, 'we can never meet'. He is not really, like Donne, being paradoxical: what at first sight looks like paradox appears, when we examine it more closely, to be merely antithesis:

Their union would her ruine be,  
 And her Tyrannick pow'r depose.

And that characteristically exhilarating piece of semi-burlesque hyperbole, that the poles-apart lovers could only be joined if the world were 'cramp'd into a *Planisphere*'—what is it but our old friend the catalogue of impossibilities, ἀδύνατα ('till oaks sweat honey', 'till fish scale the mountains', &c.), so familiar in Greek and Roman poetry, brought up to date? This is one of the great differences between Donne and Marvell: while Donne, one might almost say, devised entirely new ways of saying entirely new things, Marvell assimilated, recombined, and perfected from his contemporaries various new ways of saying old ones.

<sup>1</sup> A map or chart formed by the projection of a sphere, or part of one, on a plane. *O.E.D.* quotes from Thomas Blundeville's *Exercises*, 1594: 'Astrolabe . . . is called of some a Planisphære, because it is both flat and round, representing the Globe or Spheare, having both his Poles clapt flat together.'

In what, after the Cromwell ode, is perhaps Marvell's finest single poem, *To his Coy Mistress*, it can be shown that throughout he is doing very old and traditional things in a new way, and that he is only being very superficially like Donne. The poem is indeed, like many of Donne's and unlike *The Definition of Love*, a continuous argument, and even a more rigidly syllogistic argument than I think we shall find in any of the more serious of the *Songs and Sonets*, where Donne is usually concerned with analysis rather than with demonstration.

If we had infinite time, I should be happy to court you at leisure;  
 But our life lasts only for a moment:  
 Therefore, in order to live, we must seize the moment as it flies.

It is only, I think, in such fundamentally unserious poems as *The Will* that we shall find Donne being as neatly syllogistic as this. Where this poem most resembles Donne, and is perhaps more fundamentally indebted to his example than any other of Marvell's poems, is in its essentially dramatic tone (more dramatic than in any other of Marvell's poems), in the way in which it makes us feel that we are overhearing one of the speakers in a dialogue. But, before proceeding, let us make sure that we have the poem vividly in our minds:

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 then Empires, and more slow.  
 An hundred years should go to praise  
 Thine Eyes, and on thy Forehead Gaze.  
 Two hundred to adore each Breast:  
 But thirty thousand to the rest.  
 An Age at least to every part,  
 And the last Age should show your Heart.  
 For Lady you deserve this State;  
 Now would I love at lower rate.  
 But at my back I alwaies hear  
 Times winged, Charriot hurrying near:

And yonder all before us lye  
 Desarts of vast Eternity.  
 Thy Beauty shall no more be found;  
 Nor, in thy marble Vault, shall sound  
 My ecchoing Song: then Worms shall try  
 That long preserv'd Virginity:  
 And your quaint Honour turn to dust;  
 And into ashes all my Lust.  
 The Grave's a fine and private place,  
 But none I think do there embrace.  
 Now therefore—

and Marvell reaches the conclusion of his semi-syllogistic argument, and, after some lines which are poetically rather below the general level of his poem, magnificently concludes:

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

The tempo, *allegro molto* at least, is much faster than that of any of the more serious of Donne's *Songs and Sonets*, and, both in its speed, its mock-serious argument and its witty hyperbole, the poem might seem to have some affinity with Donne's tone and manner in some of his more exuberant elegies. The hyperbole, though—often, like that in *A Definition of Love*, approaching burlesque—is not, as I shall try to show later, really like Donne's, and the argument, although I have called it 'mock-serious', is really more serious, less paradoxical, than the sort of argument Donne conducts in the Elegies. It is also, I think, an argument which Donne would have regarded as too traditional and literary—the argument of Catullus'

Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus . . .  
 Soles occidere et redire possunt:  
 nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux,  
 nox est perpetua una dormienda,

which Ben Jonson so delightfully paraphrased as:

Come my CELIA, let us proue,  
 While we may, the sports of loue;  
 Time will not be ours for euer:  
 He, at length, our good will seuer.

Spend not then his guifts in vaine.  
 Sunnes, that set, may rise againe:  
 But if once we loose this light,  
 'Tis, with vs, perpetuall night.

On this ancient theme Marvell has executed a series of brilliant seventeenth-century variations, which were partly suggested to him by the last stanza of a poem in Cowley's *The Mistress* entitled *My Dyet*, a stanza from which Marvell has borrowed and made unforgettable the phrase 'vast Eternity'<sup>1</sup>:

On 'a *Sigh* of Pity I a year can live,  
 One *Tear* will keep me twenty 'at least,  
 Fifty a gentle *Look* will give:  
 An hundred years on one *kind word* I'll feast:  
 A thousand more will added be,  
 If you an *Inclination* have for me;  
 And all beyond is vast *Eternitie*.

Cowley was by no means the first to introduce arithmetic into love-poetry, but he has here exploited its possibilities in a way that seems to be original. The earliest of these arithmetical amorists, so far as I know, was an anonymous Alexandrian imitator of Anacreon, who, anticipating Leporello's catalogue of his master's conquests in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, wrote a poem which begins: 'If you can count the leaves of all trees and the waves of the whole ocean, then I will make you sole reckoner of my loves. First set down twenty from Athens and add to them fifteen. Then set down whole chains of loves from Corinth, for it is in Achaea, where women are beautiful.'<sup>2</sup> Catullus, at the conclusion of *Vivamus mea Lesbia*, seems to have been the first poet to write arithmetically of kisses:

Da mi basia mille, deinde centum,  
 dein mille altera, dein secunda centum —

in Ben Jonson's paraphrase:

Kisse againe: no creature comes.  
 Kisse, and score up wealthy summes

<sup>1</sup> Cowley, too, evidently thought the phrase a good one, for he used it again in the penultimate line of his ode *Sitting and Drinking in the Chair made out of the Reliques of Sir Francis Drake's Ship*, first printed in *Verses lately written upon several Occasions*, 1663:

The streits of time too narrow are for the thee,  
 Launch forth into an undiscovered Sea,  
 And steer the endless course of vast Eternity,  
 Take for thy Sail this Verse, and for thy Pilot Me.

<sup>2</sup> *Anacreontea* 14, Εἰ φύλλα πάντα δένδρων.

On my lips, thus hardly sundred,  
 While you breath. First giue a hundred,  
 Then a thousand, then another  
 Hundred, then vnto the tother  
 Adde a thousand, and so more:  
 Till you equall with the store,  
 All the grasse that *Rumney* yields  
 Or the sands in *Chelsey* fields,  
 Or the drops in siluer *Thames*,  
 Or the starres, that guild his streames.

Like Johannes Secundus<sup>1</sup> before him, the French Renaissance Latin poet Étienne Pasquier, whom I have already quoted on the subject of a lovely widow, combined, in a poem *Ad Sabinam*, this osculatory arithmetic, or arithmetical osculation, with one of the most popular themes of classical and Renaissance love-poetry, the catalogue of a mistress's charms, declaring that he would print a thousand kisses on every part of Sabina's body:

Quid reniteris? obstiniora  
 Carpo basia mille singulatim.  
 Labris millia, millia en ocellis,  
 Genis millia, millia en papillis,  
 Obsignabo, licet puella nolit.<sup>2</sup>

('Why do you resist? I snatch my kisses all the more resolutely, a thousand at a time. Thousands on lips, thousands on eyes, thousands on cheeks, thousands on breasts I will implant—unwilling though the girl may be.')

Throughout the first twenty lines of his poem Marvell is making a brilliantly original use of the time-measuring arithmetic in that stanza of Cowley's from which he borrowed the phrase 'vast Eternity'. In the passage beginning

An hundred years should go to praise  
 Thine Eyes, and on thy Forehead Gaze,

he has applied it to that traditional and popular topic, the catalogue of a mistress's charms—a novel combination, I think, although it may have been suggested to him by Pasquier's combination of that traditional catalogue with the osculatory arithmetic of Catullus. In the exuberant hyperbole and antithesis of his opening lines, declaring that, had they but world enough and time, he would be willing to court her and be refused by her from ten years before the Flood until the conversion of the Jews, Marvell is not only being original, but writing in a manner in

<sup>1</sup> *Basia*, vii.

<sup>2</sup> *Deliciae C[entum] Poetarum Gallorum*, ed. R. Gherus, 1609, ii. 1000.

which no poets except those of the English seventeenth century ever wrote. When ancient poets handled the topics of *carpe diem* and *carpe florem*, when they pointed to the contrast between the returning anise and parsley, the returning seasons, the returning sun and moon and the unreturning lives of men, or when they exhorted some unresponsive girl or boy to learn a lesson from the withering and neglected rose, they nearly always wrote with an undiluted pathos and seriousness and even solemnity; or, if any trace of a smile was there, it was a sad one. And the Renaissance Italian and French poets, when they handled these topics, nearly always preserved a similar tone. It was only certain English poets of the earlier seventeenth century who expanded and varied these and other traditional topics with the witty, elaborate, and sometimes positively hilarious ingenuity of Marvell in this poem.

This does not mean that Marvell's poem is, in comparison, slight or unserious or superficial, for in its central section it sounds notes as deep as those of any ancient poetry on the topics of *carpe diem* and *carpe florem*.

But at my back I alwaies hear  
 Times winged Charriot hurrying near:  
 And yonder all before us lye  
 Desarts of vast Eternity.  
 Thy Beauty shall no more be found;  
 Nor, in thy marble Vault, shall sound  
 My echoing Song: then Worms shall try  
 That long preserv'd Virginity:  
 And your quaint Honour turn to dust;  
 And into ashes all my Lust.  
 The Grave's a fine and private place,  
 But none I think do there embrace.

'Your quaint Honour': that indeed is a characteristically post-classical conception, with a faint echo of the *Roman de la Rose* and a much stronger one of a famous chorus in Tasso's pastoral drama *Aminta*, celebrating that *bel età del oro* when *il gigante Onor* was unknown. But behind the rest of this passage lies, I feel almost sure, either directly or indirectly (for it was imitated by several Renaissance poets, both Latin and vernacular), something much more ancient: an epigram by Asclepiades in the Greek Anthology (v. 85):

Φείδη παρθενίης· καὶ τί πλέον; οὐ γὰρ ἐς Ἄδην  
 ἔλθοῦσ' εὐρήσεις τὸν φιλέοντα, κόρη.  
 ἐν ζωῶσι τὰ περπνὰ τὰ Κύπριδος· ἐν δ' Ἀχέρωντι  
 ὀστέα καὶ σποδιή, παρθένε, κεισόμεθα.

Hoarding your maidenhood—and why? For not when to Hades  
 You've gone down shall you find, maiden, the lover you lack.  
 Only among the alive are the joys of Cypris, and only,  
 Maiden, as bones and dust shall we in Acheron lie.

Here, as so often, out of something old Marvell has made something entirely new—or, what amounts to the same thing, something that gives the impression of being entirely new.

ἐν δ' Ἀχέροντι  
 ὅστέα καὶ σποδιή, παρθένη, κεισόμεθα

The Grave's a fine and private place,  
 But none I think do there embrace:

had he not known that epigram of Asclepiades, I doubt whether Marvell would, or perhaps could, have written those lines; and yet their irony, their concentration, their colloquial vigour are absolutely Marvellian and absolutely seventeenth-century: they could have been written at no other period, and probably by no other poet. How pale and thin and unmemorable in comparison (to mention two of the most famous poets of the preceding century) is Johannes Secundus's imitation of this epigram in one of his *Elegies* (I. v) and Ronsard's imitation of Secundus's imitation in his *Ode à sa maîtresse!*<sup>1</sup> While Marvell remains absolutely contemporary, Ronsard brings in Pluto and Charon's skiff:

Pour qui gardes-tu tes yeux,  
 Et ton sein délicieux,  
 Ta joue et ta bouche belle?  
 En veux-tu baiser Pluton,  
 Là-bas, après que Caron  
 T'aura mise en sa nacelle?

While Ronsard's lines are no more than an agreeable example of neo-classic imitation, such as any other member of the Pléiade could have produced, what Marvell has given us is not so much an imitation as a transmutation. And, indeed, his whole poem is a superb example of what I meant when I said that his poetry, although in the highest degree original, would have been impossible without the numerous literary sources from which he derived inspiration, stimulation, and suggestion. A stanza of Cowley's, a poem of Catullus, a Greek epigram, possibly a neo-Latin one—we can see how they all played an essential part

<sup>1</sup> In his *Poèmes* of 1569 Ronsard published an undistinguished translation of this epigram of Asclepiades, beginning 'Dame au gros cœur, pourquoy t'espargnes-tu?', and a not much more distinguished expansion of it into a sonnet, beginning 'Douce beauté, meurdrière de ma vie.'

in the genesis of Marvell's poem, and yet, at the same time, we can also see that he has transmuted them into something unmistakably his own. This is indeed originality, but it is a different kind of originality from that which Donne wanted to achieve.

Nor is it only in what, comparatively speaking, may be called its literariness and traditionality that Marvell's manner in this poem differs from Donne's.

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.

Here we have not merely what seems to be an entirely original use of the well-established topic, or trope, of amatory arithmetic; we have also, as in *The Definition of Love*, our old classical friend, the catalogue of impossibilities, ἀδύνατα, brought up to date. But the manner in which it is brought up to date is not, I think, a manner which Marvell learnt from Donne. Donne, it is true, excelled in witty hyperbole, but these lines are not merely hyperbolic, they are almost burlesque—or, at any rate, they have a touch of that burlesque extravagance and hilarity which Marvell, I am convinced, learnt from that enormously popular contemporary poet John Cleveland and practised extensively in the Billborough and Appleton House poems and even, to some extent, in *The Garden* and the *Dialogue between the Soul and Body*. Consider, for example, the third stanza of Cleveland's *To the State of Love; or, the Senses' Festival*, first printed in the 1651 edition of his poems:

My sight took say,<sup>1</sup> but (thank my charms!)  
I now impale her in my arms;  
(Love's compasses confining you,  
Good angels, to a circle too.)  
Is not the universe strait-laced  
When I can clasp it in the waist?  
My amorous folds about thee hurled,  
Like Drake I girdle in the world;<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Made trial: see *O.E.D.*, *say*, sb.<sup>2</sup> (an aphetic form of *assay*), sense 6, 'a trial of food by taste or smell'. *O.E.D.* quotes Cooper, *Thesaurus*, 1565: 'Degusto, . . . to taste: to take a little saye.'

<sup>2</sup> In Geoffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblemes and other Devises*, 1586, there is an emblem (reproduced in Rosemary Freeman's *English Emblem Books*, 1948, p. 56) representing a freely suspended globe, on the top of which is poised



I hoop the firmament, and make  
 This, my embrace, the zodiac.  
 How would thy centre take my sense  
 When admiration doth commence  
 At the extreme circumference?

It was Cleveland too, who, in his poem *Upon Phillis walking in a morning before sun-rising*, consummated, in a manner which inspired many passages in Marvell's *Appleton House*, a characteristic seventeenth-century development of what, since it occurs in pastorals of Theocritus and Virgil, I have been accustomed to call the 'pastoral hyperbole', and which in those two poets amounted to little more than saying that all things flourished in the presence of the beloved and withered at her (or his) departure. It seems likely that the attention of our seventeenth-century poets was first directed to the possibilities of witty elaboration in this topic by that enormously popular poem of Strode's *On Chloris walking in the Snow*, itself inspired by a poem of Tasso's,<sup>1</sup> in whose *Rime* there are many elegant variations on this topic, most of them rather pale and anaemic in comparison with those of our own poets.<sup>2</sup> Even after the topic had been so often handled as to excite Suckling to something like parody,<sup>3</sup> Waller seems to have given a new lease of life to it with one of his Sacharissa poems, *At Penshurst*,<sup>4</sup> first printed in the 1645 edition of his

Drake's ship. In the top left-hand corner the hand of Providence, outstretched from a cloud, grasps one end of a girdle which hangs in a loop around the suspended globe, its other end being attached to Drake's ship.

<sup>1</sup> *Ritorno di Madonna in tempo di neve* ('La terra si copria d'orrido velo'), *Rime*, ed. Solerti, ii. 61. Tasso also has a similar poem entitled *Vista impedita della neve* ('Negro era intorno, e in bianche falde il cielo'), op. cit., 331, together with many less specialized developments of the 'pastoral hyperbole', among the more notable of which are 'Or che riede Madonna al bel soggiorno' (p. 232) and 'Or che l'aura mia dolce altrove spira' (p. 258). See also pp. 216, 222, 224, &c.

<sup>2</sup> Strode's poem was first printed in 1632, in W. Porter's *Madrigals and Airs*. Among the 'Excellent Poems . . . by other Gentlemen' in Benson's edition of Shakespeare's *Poems*, 1640, are *Lavinia Walking in a frosty Morning* (L6<sup>v</sup>) and *Vpon a Gentlewoman walking on the Grasse* (M2<sup>v</sup>). In the same year appeared as no. 126 in the first edition of *Wits Recreations* (Camden Hotten reprint of *Musarum Deliciae*, &c., vol. ii, p. 17) a poem, perhaps more obviously inspired by Strode's, beginning 'I saw faire *Flora* take the aire'.

<sup>3</sup> In the dialogue-poem between himself ('J. S.') and Carew ('T. C.') *Vpon my Lady Carliles walking in Hampton-Court garden*, which must have been written before Carew's death in 1640 and Suckling's in 1642.

<sup>4</sup> 'Had Sacharissa (1645: 'Dorothea') lived when mortals made', *Poems*, ed. Thorn-Drury, i. 46. Waller seems to have begun paying his addresses to

Poems, a poem from which I think it can be shown that both Cleveland and Marvell took hints. But while Waller and his predecessors, though bolder and more vigorous than Tasso, had still kept their personifications within more or less decorous and classical bounds, Cleveland in this poem, printed in his first volume of 1647, lets himself go with a riotous and hilarious extravagance that approaches burlesque.

The sluggish morn as yet undressed,  
 My Phillis brake from out her East,  
 As if she'd made a match to run  
 With Venus, usher to the sun.  
 The trees, like yeomen of her guard,  
 Serving more for pomp than ward,  
 Ranked on each side, with loyal duty  
 Weave branches to enclose her beauty.  
 The plants, whose luxury was lopped,  
 Or age with crutches underpropped,  
 Whose wooden carcasses are grown  
 To be but coffins of their own,  
 Revive, and at her general dole  
 Each receives his ancient soul.  
 The winged choiristers began  
 To chirp their matins, and the fan  
 Of whistling winds like organs played,  
 Until their voluntaries made  
 The wakened East in odours rise  
 To be her morning sacrifice.

I have only time to place side by side with this a few lines from that passage towards the end of *Appleton House* where Nature pays her respect to the 'young Maria', but they should be sufficient to demonstrate that this way of writing, which we have come to regard as so characteristic of him, was suggested to Marvell by Cleveland:

See how loose Nature, in respect  
 To her, it self doth recollect;  
 And every thing so whisht and fine,  
 Starts forth with to its *Bonne Mine*.  
 The *Sun* himself, of *Her* aware,  
 Seems to descend with greater Care;  
 And lest *She* see him go to Bed,  
 In blushing Clouds conceales his Head.

(st. lxxxiii)

Lady Dorothy Sidney ('Sacharissa') towards the end of 1635, and presumably ceased to address poems to her after her marriage in 1639.

'Tis *She* that to these Gardens gave  
 That wondrous Beauty which they have.  
 (st. lxxxvii)

Therefore what first *She* on them spent,  
 They gratefully again present:  
 The Meadow Carpets where to tread;  
 The Garden Flow'rs to Crown *Her* Head;  
 And for a Glass the limpid Brook,  
 Where *She* may all *her* Beautyes look;  
 But, since *She* would not have them seen,  
 The Wood about *her* draws a Skreen.  
 (st. lxxxviii)

My time is up, and I have been able to do little more than scratch the surface of this fascinating subject. Except in my incidental allusion to what I have called the 'pastoral hyperbole', I have said nothing about Marvell's happy acquiescence in various characteristic seventeenth-century developments of the pastoral tradition and of what, including therein both Marlowe's *Passionate Shepherd* and Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, might be called the 'catalogue of delights'. While Donne seems to have scornfully rejected all topics and subjects that might tempt readers to admire him for anything but his sheer poetic skill, anything, such as descriptions of things obviously beautiful or attractive, which stimulated what modern critics have called the 'stock response', Marvell's originality was of a much more tolerant and unambitious kind. He was ready, one might almost say, to accept, to exploit, and to recombine, to Marvellize and seventeenth-centuryfy, anything that had ever made poetry enjoyable.