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REPRESENTING CROMWELL: MARVELL'S "WISER ART"

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The past decade has witnessed an effort on the part of Marvell critics to "rehistoricize" the *Horatian Ode*. In an essay published in 1981, Judith Richards rejected the "cavalier" readings of the New Criticism, and made an appeal for interdisciplinary readings of the poem that would restore historical contexts and recover "what meaning Marvell might have been seeking to convey to a contemporary audience."¹ Six years later, Marion Campbell argued a similar interpretive agenda, also attacking the New Critics for their ahistorical readings and, while acknowledging a "distinguished" line of historical criticism by the work of scholars such as Wallace and Patterson, asserting that deeper scrutiny of the relation of literature and history is still needed.²

This widely shared concern has occasioned many rich historical readings of the ode during the past ten years by critics including Warren Chernaik, Kenneth Elliot, Derek Hirst, Michael Wilding, and Blair Worden.³ It is worth noting, however, that the interpretive goals of these readings differ remarkably little from those of the older historical or even the New Critical readings. Commentaries on the poem have consisted and continue to consist of attempts (whether textual, historical, or biographical in emphasis) to stabilize the poem so as to assess its representations of Cromwell, Charles I, and the regicide, and to establish Marvell's precise stance with regard to them. The poem's notorious refusal to be thus resolved continues for the most part—as it has in the past—to be attributed either to the poet's own uncertainty or to his deliberate equivocation.

Kenneth Elliott's essay is typical in its fashioning of Marvell as a sophisticated thinker who expresses very tentative political judgments: "The way in which Marvell's perception of Oliver Cromwell changed is an

indication of the complexity of the choices of political allegiance facing an alert and sensitive mind."⁴ Similarly, Blair Worden finds in the poem a fundamental ambivalence: "It resists any partisan reading. The more one struggles with the elusiveness of the ode, the more that elusiveness appears to be at its heart." He accounts for this ambiguity by positing Marvell's own ambivalence: "the Marvell of the *Horatian Ode* is a man of troubled and divided loyalties."⁵

In contrast, Michael Wilding's important 1987 essay accounts for the poem's ambiguity as part of the rhetorical strategy of a Marvell who is not at all undecided in his opinions but is cleverly advancing a political argument, communicated by what is conspicuously excluded from that very argument (conspicuous, at least, to his original audience). Accusing Cleanth Brooks of depoliticizing the poem, Wilding argues that "the poem gives the impression of dispassionately considering all the political possibilities, but its full political nature lies not in its created 'impression of the mind detachedly at play over a number of possible choices' but in its skilful exclusion of certain possibilities and manipulation of others," Leveller opposition to the Irish campaign being the central element excluded.⁶ While Wilding's insights are strikingly original and illuminating, his method places him in the same interpretive community as earlier commentators who argued that Marvell's ambiguity deliberately cloaks a definite political conviction, whether Royalist or Cromwellian.

I have no quarrel with these approaches, except that they give insufficient attention to an important element in the hermeneutic equation. Specifically, when the *Horatian Ode* is placed within the context of other poems about Cromwell—poems by such contemporaries as Cowley, Wither, Waller, Sprat, and Dryden—it becomes evident that a major factor in the ambiguity of Marvell's representations (in addition to authorial uncertainty or equivocation) is the sheer difficulty of fashioning with language any stable representation of Cromwell, or of objectifying the significance of contemporaneous political developments. I believe that the earnest but fundamentally problematic representations of Cromwell by Marvell's contemporaries reveal that Marvell himself was uniquely conscious of this hermeneutic dilemma and that in his poem he is as interested in critiquing political rhetoric as in characterizing his own political views.

To illustrate, I shall examine the working out of two interpretive paradigms utilized by Marvell and his contemporaries. Critics have often noted that the writers on Cromwell frequently utilized Calvinistic providentialism (with its Christian view of history) and popularized Machiavellianism (with its classical orientation) to explain the events of the

day.⁷ These binary oppositions provide the simplifications of Cromwell's actions and character useful to both his supporters and his critics for political propaganda as well as serving the purpose of fashioning unprecedented events into existing structures of meaning. Cromwell's supporters interpret him through the ideological grid of Calvinistic providentialism, and his critics place him in a context of classical historiography and Machiavellianism, both attempting to make Cromwell comprehensible and congenial to their world view.

Cowley, for example, characterizes Cromwell as the absurd plaything of Fortune, raised for a brief span of glory on her wheel, but soon to be crushed under it. Clarendon's analysis of the events of the wars and Commonwealth is similarly classical, though his interpretation of Cromwell's role as manipulating events focuses not on fortune but on the power of strong individuals to shape history. Conversely, Milton, Marvell, Wither, and others find in providentialism the means of understanding and defending Cromwell.

Political events resist neat categorization, however, so we often discover the panegyrists utilizing the terms of classical historiography, and the Royalists relying on the same scriptures as the Puritans to characterize Cromwell. In fact, the purposes of both parties are often subverted by the fact that Cromwell's behavior and character can just as easily be categorized as providential or Machiavellian, so that the actions pointed out by the Royalist as absolute proof of his self-serving opportunism are utilized equally convincingly by the Parliamentarians as the seal of providence. This pattern of appropriating and subverting conflicting ideologies to prove a point or deal with an unprecedented fact permeates the literature on Cromwell: the paradigms used to fashion Cromwell, existing within discourse, are inherently unstable and inevitably slip into one another.

This difficulty with representational language is evident when Cromwell's panegyrists attempt to fit him neatly into a providential frame. Cromwell, who is a man of blood as soldier and regicide, and who possesses clear personal ambition, thus lacks the trappings of sanctity. By his own virtuosity, he tends to focus attention on himself rather than on God. Therefore, in casting Cromwell in a providential role, his supporters must address the problem of those obvious qualifications which, as his detractors persistently point out, tend to make him appear an exemplar of Machiavellian *virtu*. Demonstrating that Cromwell lacked this or that quality of Machiavelli's Prince, though important, is only half of the task. The more difficult half lies in finding positive grounds for praising Cromwell that aren't already claimed by Machiavelli as praise for his Prince.

Providentialism and Machiavellianism share many terms that are uti-

lized to demonstrate membership in either system: "success," for instance, could equally well be interpreted as the mark of Machiavellian *virtu*, or as the evidence of divine favor. Of course, Cromwell's enemies have the same problem in reverse: this resistance of language to stable—or reductive—representational categorizing is equally vexing to those who attempt to fashion Cromwell as a mere self-serving Machiavel.

A case in point is Abraham Cowley's history of Cromwell in *A DISCOURSE by way of VISION Concerning the Government of Oliver Cromwell* (1659),⁸ a multigenre diatribe constructed in such a way as to establish that it is indeed Cromwell the man who is author of events, and that his actions are alien to models of Christian behavior. From this perspective, Cromwell is, in fact, the quintessential Machiavel. In his vision, an angelic being singing Cromwell's praises confronts Cowley, who immediately realizes that this "strange and terrible Apparition" is of the devil's party, if not the very Devil himself. The devil's praise of Cromwell provides Cowley with the occasion for a fiery anti-Cromwell diatribe,⁹ which takes the form of a clever two-pronged attack. First, the Machiavellian terms of the devil's panegyric on Cromwell provide occasion and righteous indignation for Cowley's venomous response; additionally, Cromwell's praise is itself subverted by the devilish speaker. Praise from one's enemies is more damning than the censure of one's friends.

Cowley begins his *Discourse* by fashioning Cromwell with an inflammatory iconographic image: the Machiavellian devil stands naked but adorned (or "deformed" as Cowley says) with painted images of civil-war battles on his body—Nasby centered on his chest—holding upright a sword containing Cromwell's motto, *Pax quaeritur bello*, "Let peace be won through war." His persona is horrified at seeing Cromwell's bloody sword held by this frightful demon. Cowley's image thus attributes cruelty and duplicity to Cromwell as soldier, reminding us of the duke whom Machiavelli endorses in *The Prince* for empowering his captain, Remirro de Orca, to restore peace through savage force and cruelty but who then makes a public display of cutting Remirro's body in half to impute the cruelty to his captain, and justice and restraint to himself.¹⁰ Although the notion of establishing peace with the sword was a popular commonplace,¹¹ Cowley's portrait clearly attempts to discredit the role of peacemaker by associating it with Cromwell's militarism. The devil praises Cromwell for the invincibility of his military stratagems, for Cromwell's ability "to over-run each corner of the three Nations, and overcome with equal facility both the riches of the South, and the poverty of the North; to be feared and courted by all foreign Princes, and adopted a Brother to the gods of the earth" (347). In placing the emphasis

on Cromwell's personal military prowess, Cowley utilizes the facts of Cromwell's military career to frame him as a great mover in the classical sense, as "a Brother to the gods of the earth" and in so doing to impute to him the qualities of Machiavelli's hero.

Cromwell's supporters, on the other hand, could utilize these same facts to fashion a hero. Twentieth-century writers have argued that Cromwell was a brilliantly unorthodox and innovative military strategist and leader, and that his increasing acquisition of power was a corollary of his military virtuosity.¹² Cromwell's tactics for developing the regiments of his New Model Army were controversial: he discarded the conventional wisdom and social prejudice that assumed only men of gentle birth could be officers; he rejected the use of mercenary soldiers; and he extended his iron discipline so far as to deny his soldiers the traditional right to plunder the conquered. Perhaps even more controversial than the crossing of social boundaries was Cromwell's policy of permitting in his ranks men of all Protestant religious sects. Nevertheless, these factors—the melding of social and religious classes, the camaraderie and energy generated through mutual acceptance, the rigorous discipline, the love of the men for their leader, the innovative use of a regrouping cavalry—created the army that was responsible for Parliament's victory. Thus while Cromwell's formidable military success could seem problematic from a Christian perspective, his success could also be understood in a providential framework, utilized by the panegyrists to fashion Cromwell into an apocalyptic warrior. Waller, in his poem, "A Panegyric to my Lord Protector," fashions Cromwell into a hero whose very conquests are acts of grace, whose "never-failing sword made war to cease," and who now "heals us with the arts of peace."¹³ Dryden, in his "Heroic Stanzas on the Death of Oliver Cromwell," says that Cromwell "fought to end our fighting" and that "Peace was the prize of all his toil and care"; and he sets these worthy endeavors in a specifically providential interpretive context, suggesting that Cromwell's heroism and success cannot be explained entirely in human terms.¹⁴ He instead claims that "such heroic virtue Heaven sets out"; and that Cromwell is the true Christian hero: "How strangely high endeavors may be blest, / Where piety and valour jointly go" (147–148).

But Cromwell, thus fashioned, has feet of clay, at least from his critics' perspective. Cowley, for example, sees Cromwell's part in the execution of Charles as a compelling illustration of an individual's ability shape history, and as evidence of Cromwell's ambition. It is also a potent argument against representations of Cromwell as peacemaker. In itself, the act of regicide is not necessarily linked with Machiavelli, though the two were often associated, as in the portraits of Richard III (a parallel Cowley does not fail to point

out). The devil contrives to justify Cromwell's act of regicide by setting it in a classical framework of great human endeavor. Cromwell is to be applauded for having "the courage to attempt, and the happiness to succeed in so improbable a design, as the destruction of one of the most antient, and most solidly founded Monarchies upon the Earth . . . that he should have the power or boldness to put his Prince and Master to an open and infamous death" (347). The terms "courage" and "power" and "boldness," coming as they are from the mouth of the Machiavellian demon, must be read as *virtu*. In setting up this equation, "Cromwell's apparent courage is actually Machiavellian *virtu*," Cowley supplants the terms of praise Cromwell's supporters use, effecting a shift of meaning that subverts attempts to praise Cromwell for his personal prowess. The joke is on the panegyrist who must praise Cromwell in terms that can so easily connote villainy.

Furthermore, in addition to using the self-subverting words of the devil to position Cromwell as a pagan hero or villain, Cowley, in his answer to the devil, recasts Cromwell's actions in a slightly different frame, which preserves the demon's pagan categories but makes him explicitly Machiavellian as well. Cowley says Cromwell's crime was "to set up Counsels of Rapine, and Courts of Murder, to fight against the king under a commission for him; to take him forcibly out of the hands of those for whom he had conquered him; to draw him into his Net, with protestations and vows of fidelity, and when he had caught him in it, to butcher him, with as little shame, or Conscience, or Humanity, in the open face of the whole World" (349). Cowley's narration of the events surrounding the execution selects and arranges the historical data so as to depict the events not merely as acts of barbarism or rage but as the direct result of Cromwell's deliberate and controlled design. Thus Cowley makes Cromwell the subject of a series of active verbs: he "set up counsels," "fought against the king," took him forcibly, drew him into his net, and butchered him, all with the majestic autonomy and self-assurance of a Greek hero.

But Cowley's reductive portrait crumbles, as he foolishly buttresses his image with mere cant—such as his accusation that Cromwell had secretly negotiated to sell St. Paul's Cathedral to the Jews for a synagogue—and with other blatantly selective and highly fictionalized accounts of events. In it, Cowley displaces Fairfax's role—who seized the king and brought him to London—as well as the army's, whose increasing anarchy forced Cromwell's hand, even as Cromwell himself was holding out for a restoration of monarchy. It also portrays as monolithic a divided and contentious Parliament, and generates an image of a solitary Cromwell triumphantly displaying the head of Charles whom he has single-handedly "butchered." Cowley must

construct his ideological image in this way because the man and events he is describing are just as effectively interpreted and defended as providential, as Milton's representation illustrates.

The initial image in Milton's panegyric to Oliver Cromwell in *The Second Defense of the English People* is of a man of God in whose breast burned the "flame of piety."¹⁵ Following this image, Milton portrays Cromwell as a great military hero, described at times with words that Cowley's demon might well have spoken. "The whole surface of the British empire has been the scene of his exploits and the theater of his triumphs which alone would furnish ample materials for a history and want a copiousness of narration not inferior to the magnitude and diversity of the transactions" (832). Milton goes on to point out that Cromwell's personal character was such that from the beginning men flocked to him, desiring to serve in his ranks; that it was not possible to enumerate "the many towns which he has taken, the many battles which he has won" (832). Milton places these words, which alone might appear as barefaced exaltation of power, in a different ideological context from Cowley's. His juxtaposition of piety and militarism is crucial. While emphasizing Cromwell's personal might, Milton avoids making him a Machiavellian prince by shifting the grounds of his success from pagan *virtu* to Christian virtue. Cromwell, says Milton, attained his power over other men by first attaining power over himself through pious temperance and self-government: "He had either extinguished, or by habit had learned to subdue, the whole host of vain hopes, fears, and passions which infest the soul . . . so that on the first day he took the field against the external enemy he was a veteran in arms, consummately practiced in the toils and exigencies of war" (832). Milton makes it clear that such self-control in Cromwell is not pagan *virtu* by claiming that his was particularly a Christian virtue: "the good and the brave were from all quarters attracted to his camp, not only as to the best school of military talents, but of piety and virtue" (832).

Cowley's and Milton's accounts of Cromwell's notable exploits conflict because each perceives the same facts according to his own ideology. Cowley characterizes Cromwell's military victories as the acts of a butcher who "breaks his faith with all Enemies, and with all friends equally," and who "tramples on all his equals and betters." This is fine Machiavellian portraiture and disregards such common knowledge as the celebrated discipline and restraint of Cromwell's troops. In contrast, Milton makes Cromwell's pious self-government the centerpiece of his portrait of the New Model army,

which was formidable to the enemy in the field, but never cruel to those who laid down their arms; which committed no lawless ravages on the persons or the property of the inhabitants, who,

when they compared their conduct with the turbulence, the intemperance, the impiety, and the debauchery of the royalists, were wont to salute them as friends and to consider them as guests. They were a stay to the good, a terror to the evil, and the warmest advocates for every exertion of piety and virtue. (833)

Milton's account presents Cromwell's exploits as those of an apocalyptic army bringing about the stern yet merciful judgment of God, a representation of events that conforms to English providentialism and may contain without disjunction an event such as the massacre of the priests at Drogheda. Similarly, while Cowley charges Cromwell with "usurping three kingdoms without any shadow of the least pretensions, and governing them as unjustly as he got them," Milton celebrates the conquests of Scotland and Ireland as succeeding in doing what "all our monarchs, during a period of eight hundred years" had struggled in vain to do. Milton takes as self-evident the justification for these conquests, referring to the Irish as "rebels" and noting that Cromwell's treatment of the Scots came in response to their "irruption into England with the king in their train". He celebrates as unmixed blessing the conquest of the Scots, making particular reference to such things as Cromwell's having "almost annihilated the remainder of their forces" at Worcester. But again his praise of violence is moderated by his characterization of Cromwell as a pious man of God who with "unwearied diligence" dealt with the rebel Scots (833). Milton's method of focusing on Cromwell's pious character—a character carefully fashioned—each time he extols his actions is the way he manages, albeit precariously, to keep Cromwell within the constraints of Christian, as opposed to Machiavellian, heroism.

The regicide unquestionably provides Cowley with the greatest indictment against Cromwell's claim of spiritual motivation, and does in fact present the greatest difficulty for his defenders. Cromwell's panegyrists seem to share the tacit assumption that the difficult matter of Charles's execution was best dealt with by silence. Milton, Waller, Dryden, and Sprat in their panegyrics make no reference to Cromwell's part in the execution of the king, and their praise of his military success focuses rather on his part in ending the civil wars and in his expansion of the British empire. Only Marvell and Wither specifically grapple with the problem.¹⁶ George Wither approaches the subject with caution in his "Epitaph" on Cromwell in *Salt upon Salt*,¹⁷ and his defense illustrates the risks of the endeavor and the perilous insubstantiality of ideological representations:

His Predecessor's Sins and our,
 Made way for Him to Sovereign Power;
 By rendring that an Act of Reason;
 And Justice, which had else been Treason. (5–8)

Wither thus justifies the regicide by carefully setting Cromwell and events in a Christian framework, wherein political phenomena are assigned spiritual meanings. He understands the motivating agent of Cromwell's act to be the sins of Charles and the English people, thereby making the execution a spiritual necessity, an "act of Reason and Justice." Yet Wither also recognizes that the act is redeemable only by defining it in these terms, that an interpretation that sees events as the consequences of the willful act of a self-motivated individual would make the execution an act of treason. In consequence, the passage's grammatical construction reduces the focus on Cromwell as individual mover, making him the receiver of the action rather than the subject. "Sins," the subject, are the force that "made way" for Cromwell to gain "Sovereign Power." Wither thus fashions him as one compelled by spiritual necessity to commit an otherwise heinous act. The poet, in effect, identifies the events' author as God, not Cromwell.

But the events, so fashioned, are unstable. Wither does not end his poem here, and some of what follows has the effect of unraveling the certainty of his judgment on the regicide and on Cromwell himself. The emphasis shifts almost irresistibly to Cromwell the man:

This World afford no Pattern can
Which better shews what is in Man.
His Vertues, were enough to do,
So much as GOD design'd Him to.
He Failings had: But, when liv'd any
That had not every way as many,
If he (whilst here abode he made)
Such Tempters and Temptations had? (13–20)

Here Wither portrays Cromwell as the pattern of all men, a mixture of virtue and vice. On the surface this perspective does correspond to Wither's earlier portrait of Cromwell as being merely an instrument of God's designs and can be seen as further deflecting the view of Cromwell as aspiring hero in the classical or Machiavellian sense. The issue here, however, is not typical human sin and temptation but the extraordinary act of killing the king. In reducing Cromwell to the status of an erring human in order to avoid the problems of making him too much like a pagan hero, Wither also risks stripping Cromwell of the moral authority—that special knowledge of God—that makes the regicide righteous and reasonable rather than treasonous. The terms of Wither's defense may thus function as ammunition for attacks on Cromwell.

From the preceding polemics, we can see that a fundamental problem in all straightforward ideological representations—both accolades and attacks—is that they attempt to create monolithic pictures of complex subjects,

pictures that cannot be contained within discursive categories or maintained under the force of reality. Cromwell the Christian warrior-saint; Cromwell the Machiavel; Cromwell the Conqueror; Cromwell the judge and patriarch; Cromwell the king: all such images, whether fashioned by Cromwell's supporters and detractors, by Cromwell himself, or by his historical observers crumble in the end because the reality of Cromwell consists in all of them, but is fully encompassed by no single one.

Marvell's *Ode* reveals the futility of attempting a definitive characterization or judgment of Cromwell and the events of his day. Whereas the other writers try to force Cromwell into a limited mold, Marvell points to the insufficiency of such attempts. The *Ode* is more a poem on political ideology and its rhetoric than it is on Cromwell, and, as a result, is the least reductive and doctrinaire of the poems on Cromwell. In the panegyrics and diatribes of Cowley, Waller, Sprat, Wither, Milton, and Dryden, the representations of Cromwell are heavily buttressed with ideology, and they collapse or unravel only against the earnest efforts of the poets.¹⁸ The fashioning of Cromwell in the *Horatian Ode* is decidedly different. Although Marvell, like the others, utilizes Machiavellianism and Providentialism as key paradigms for interpretation, he presents neither in the clear ascendancy. Instead, he juxtaposes them in the most daring manner, often balancing the two paradigms on a single word or image, thus generating a hermeneutic predicament in which the interpretation of a single word or image can nudge the entire representation into one political camp or the other. This witty manipulation of paradigms gives the poem a riddling, at times almost playful, tone quite unlike the high seriousness of the other works—and quite unlike Marvell's own later Cromwell poems.¹⁹

Critics have noted, for instance, the syntactic ambiguity of many lines, such as "To ruin the great work of time," with its hermeneutically equivocal word "great"; or the subtle but significant shift in stance in these lines of apparent praise, "Nor yet grown stiffer with command, / but still in the Republic's hand." Here the shift is effected if we emphasize "yet" and "still," as the iambic meter would suggest. There are other such examples as well.²⁰ More significant than such word-play, however, is Marvell's duplicitous use of the central representational metaphors of the poem. Critics have speculated upon Marvell's philosophy of history and his attitude to the regicide based on the interpretation of the "three-forked Lightning" passage.²¹ This passage is certainly interesting in terms of what it may reveal about Marvell's convictions, but it also provides a fascinating instance of colliding paradigms. The metaphor responds to the crucial question of the poem: who authors the social upheavals? What motivates Cromwell, the "forced Pow'r?" Is the

phrase "forced pow'r" Christian or Machiavellian? Is Cromwell "forced" by God to "ruine the great Work of Time, / And cast the Kingdoms old / Into another Mold," or does Cromwell the man force his own will upon events? The answer hinges on how one interprets the metaphor following, which Marvell employs to characterize his military achievements:

So restless Cromwel could not cease
In the inglorious Arts of Peace,
But through adventrous War
Urged his active Star.
And, like the three-fork'd Lightning, first
Breaking the Clouds where it was nurst,
Did thorough his own Side
His fiery way divide.²²

The answer to the riddle would appear to be contained in the metaphor of Cromwell as "three-fork'd Lightning," a richly ambiguous image that resides on the borders of Providentialism and Machiavellianism. It suggests either powerful natural forces or, with its trinity of forks, supernatural power and willful intent. The lightning, in conjunction with the contention that "restless Cromwel . . . Urged his active star," may be the symbol of Cromwell's own powerful will and thus move him into Machiavellian territory. Marvell's subsequent comment destabilizes this interpretation, however: "Tis Madness to resist or blame / The force of angry Heavens flame" (25–26). It is "madness" to resist Cromwell only if he is indeed the instrument of angry heaven and a Providential, God-directed force, as these lines suggest; it is madness not to resist if he is merely another Richard III. If this is Marvell's perspective, then he may share Wither's view of Cromwell as a mere instrument of God's uncontrollable intent. But the reader is prevented from settling on this interpretation as well, because Marvell immediately juxtaposes this ostensibly Christian concept with an assertion that suggests a classical perspective: "And, if we would speak true, / Much to the Man is due" (27–28). Thus Marvell teases the reader. These four lines embody the two opposing views of Cromwell, and thus hold a key to the interpretation of the entire poem and its fashioning of Cromwell. This tension may indeed result from Marvell's own political wariness or uncertainty. But it is also possible that Marvell is deliberately and satirically illustrating the inherent instability of representational language, along with the absurd attempts by others to fashion Cromwell in absolute terms.

Such an agenda seems especially plausible in Marvell's presentation of Cromwell and the Irish campaign.

And now the Irish are asham'd
To see themselves in one Year tam'd:

So much one Man can do,
 That does both act and know.
 They can affirm his Praises best,
 And have, though overcome, confest
 How good he is, how just,
 And fit for highest Trust. (73–80)

Cleanth Brooks, assuming that Marvell viewed Cromwell through a Machiavellian lens, saw these lines as obviously ironic, while Bush, assuming a providential lens, argued that they were straightforward. Both stances can be argued equally well; thus Marvell presents us another riddle. From our present perspective, the irony needs least argument: we may easily grant that the Irish "are asham'd" following their conquest, and that in a bitter sense they, the conquered, can in fact "affirm his Praises best"; but that they should affirm his goodness and justice is absurd, the irony almost too blatant. If the Irish had any reason to consider Cromwell "good" and "just" it would probably be for the restraint with which he carried out the Irish campaign, the fact that he permitted no pillage and rape of the peasantry as was customarily part of conquest; but even this seems more like an English projection than true Irish sentiment. Furthermore, irony exists comfortably in the poem's atmosphere of ambiguity and equivocation. And if one decides from the evidence that Marvell sees Cromwell as Machiavellian, then these lines must be read ironically.

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that Waller, Dryden, and Milton express a view of the Irish campaign that is strikingly analogous to Marvell's, similarly characterizing the Irish as praising Cromwell. Waller, for instance, says in his *Panegyric* that the Scots and Irish are "Preferred by conquest, happily o'erthrown" (93). And Marvell's noting of the Irish praise is presented in the straightforward manner of the other poets, and the terms of the praise fit Cromwell's own providential view of his accomplishment, as he expressed in his correspondence.²³ One can effectively argue that Marvell is taking a providential view, focusing on God's judgment and Cromwell's restraint and seeing the slaughter of the priests at Drogheda as no consideration at all—except, perhaps, as further reason for the Irish to be grateful.

At least as interesting as what Marvell "really thought," however, is the way Marvell again manipulates the two opposing interpretive paradigms. How one interprets Cromwell's Irish victory—as providential or Machiavellian—hinges to a considerable extent on one equivocal line in the passage: "So much can one man do / That does both act and know." Marvell's praise of the achievements possible for one man "that does both act and know" is ideologically ambivalent, depending on how one interprets the verb "know."

What, exactly, is the nature of the knowledge Cromwell possesses that enables him to attain unprecedented victory? There are two possibilities that conform to the Cromwell of his letters, as well as to the conceptions of Cromwell put forward by the panegyrists. Cromwell's knowledge may be "self-knowledge" of the kind that Waller refers to: "Oft have we wondered how you hid in peace / A mind proportioned to such things as these; / How such a ruling spirit you could restrain, / And practise first over yourself to reign" (129–132). Earlier in the poem Marvell hints at such a notion, where he refers to Cromwell in his private gardens, "where / He liv'd reserved and austere." Asceticism and spiritual preparation conjure up images of saints and religious heroes such as Moses, and other writers on Cromwell see these traits as a fountainhead of his later achievement. Another possibility is that the knowledge Marvell attributes to Cromwell is specifically a spiritual knowledge, such as that underlying Cromwell's assessment of the victory at Naseby: "Surely, sir, this is the hand of God." Cromwell "knows" the will of God for the English and "acts" in response to that knowledge, bringing about unprecedented victory. Of course it is just as credible to construe such knowing and acting as qualities of Machiavelli's prince, specifically as cunning and *virtu*, and there is just as much evidence in the poem to support such a reading.²⁴ At the least, Marvell's words, "So much one Man can do" carry sufficient Machiavellian overtones to destabilize the image of Cromwell as Christian saint and cast doubt on the conviction that his success in war is the sure mark of divine instrumentality. Marvell might actually be expressing the ironic perspective that Cowley later develops in the *Discourse*, in which it is the devil who suggests that Cromwell's power comes from the Almighty and that "all men who are the effectors of extraordinary mutations in the world, must needs have extraordinary forces of Nature by which they are enabled to turn about, as they please, so great a Wheel" (360). Cowley refutes this view by citing historical instances demonstrating that, when Providence sets about making major changes in the world, it utilizes means that cannot be mistaken for the exclusively human. Cowley thus argues the scriptural view that God uses the weak and ignorant of this world to carry out his most important tasks, so confounding the cunning, a view that challenges Cromwell on his own ground.²⁵ By having the devil defend Cromwell's actions as providential, Cowley implies that a Machiavel can hypocritically use Cromwell's view of providence. Again, Marvell plays with these slippery possibilities by wittily placing disproportionate interpretive weight on the word "know."

In this way, Marvell's central representations of Cromwell and events invite collisions of opposing ideologies and blatantly refuse to be definitively

set in either camp. In doing so, they provide all who attempt to seize Cromwell for their own ideology with an object lesson that artfully enacts the difficulties of one-sided representation. No sooner does one fashion a portrait than it begins to break apart, for Cromwell's identity is not an "essence" to be captured, but a plurality of meanings and interpretations. In his pattern of presenting, then subverting, conflicting conceptions of Cromwell's actions, Marvell acknowledges the need to find order in disorder by conceptualizing political realities, while at the same time demonstrating the hopelessness of ever arriving at comfortable political certainties. The consequence is, of course, vulnerability and uncertainty, the tone, perhaps, in which Marvell finishes his portrait of Oliver Cromwell: "The same Arts that did gain / A Pow'r must it maintain."

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NOTES

1. Judith Richards, "Literary Criticism and the Historian: Towards Reconstructing Marvell's Meaning in 'An Horatian Ode,'" *Literature and History* 7 (1981): 44.

2. Marion Campbell, "Rehistoricising the Marvell Text," *Southern Review* 20 (July, 1987): 126-137.

3. See Warren Cherniak, *The Poet's Time: Politics and Religion in the Work of Andrew Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Kenneth Elliot, "Andrew Marvell and Oliver Cromwell," *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 26 (1982): 75-89; Derek Hirst, "'That Sober Liberty: ' Marvell's Cromwell in 1654,'" in *The Golden and Brazen World: Papers in Literature and History, 1650-1800*, ed. John M. Wallace (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 17-53; Michael Wilding, "Marvell's 'An Horatian Ode Upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland', The Levellers, and the Junta," *Modern Language Review* 82 (1987): 1-14; Blair Worden, "Andrew Marvell, Oliver Cromwell, and the *Horatian Ode*" in *Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England*, eds. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 147-180.

4. Kenneth Elliot, "Andrew Marvell and Oliver Cromwell," 89.

5. Blair Worden, "*Horatian Ode*," 172, 159.

6. Michael Wilding, "The Levellers, and the Junta," 3.

7. For representative treatments of the Horatian Ode from these two perspectives, see J. A. Mazzeo, "Marvell's Machiavellian Cromwell," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21 (1960): 1-17, and John M. Wallace, "Marvell's *Horatian Ode*," *PMLA* 77 (1962): 33-45. Most recently, Blair Worden, "*Horatian Ode*," 163, utilizes Machiavellianism as an interpretive device, suggesting that "during the Puritan Revolution, the period when Machiavelli's influence in England was at its peak, Machiavelli's prince became the archetype summoned by writers seeking to catch the greatness and meteoric rise of Cromwell."

8. *The English Writings of Abraham Cowley*, ed. A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906), 342-383. Subsequent references will appear in the text by page number.

9. Cromwell, it would seem, was more tolerant: Cowley was one of several exiled Royalist writers whom he permitted to return to England during the Protectorate.

10. *The Prince*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 26.

11. Note, for example, "The Sword hath place, till War doth cease; And, useful is, in time of Peace." George Wither, *A collection of emblemes ancient and modern* (London: R. Milbourne, 1635), vol. 2, page 90, illustration 27.

12. See, for instance, Christopher Hill, *God's Englishman*, (New York: Dial, 1970).

13. *The Poems of Edmund Waller* (New York: Greenwood, 1968), 138-143.

14. Dryden's poem appeared along with poems by Waller and Sprat in a 1659 volume entitled, *Three Poems upon the Death of His Late Highness Oliver Lord Protector of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (Pamphlet Collection, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, Los Angeles).

15. In *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey, 1957), 832. Subsequent references to this work will appear in the text by page number.

16. Milton, of course, deals extensively with the regicide in his *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* and in *Eikonoclastes*, (*Complete Poems and Prose*, ed. Hughes, 750-780; 781-816); but he never touches on the matter in his fashioning of Cromwell.

17. *Miscellaneous Works of George Wither*, Fourth Collection (New York: Burt Franklin, 1967), 44.

18. The same might be said, by the way, of much of the *Horatian Ode* criticism, which consistently fails in its attempt to set Marvell's ode securely in one ideological camp or another.

19. One may appreciate this quality in the Ode without diminishing the traditional valuation of the poem as being, in Barbara Everett's words, "a landmark at the center of the age: grave, weighty and unshakably judicious."

20. See Douglas Bush, "Marvell's *Horatian Ode*," *Sewanee Review* 60 (1952): 363-376, and Warren Chernaik's discussion in *The Poet's Time*. See also G. D. Monsarrat, "Marvell's Use of 'Nor Yet,' With Special Reference to the 'Horatian Ode,'" *English Language Notes*, 18 (December 1980): 104-108.

21. Bush, Brooks, and Chernaik grapple with this passage in the essays I've referred to. I am especially indebted for the observations that follow to C. A. Patrides' illuminating article, "'Till prepared for longer flight': The Sublunar Poetry of Andrew Marvell," in *Approaches to Marvell*, ed. C. A. Patrides (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

22. H. M. Margoliouth, ed., *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*, 2 vols., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), vol. 1, 91, ll. 9-16. Subsequent references to this edition's line numbers will appear in the text.

23. See, for instance, his letter to Colonel Valentine Walton in Thomas Carlyle's collection, *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches: With Elucidations*, 4 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), vol. 1, 188.

24. J. A. Mazzeo makes such a case in "Marvell's Machiavellian Cromwell," arguing that "Cromwell comes fulfilling the prophecy of that greatest of unnamed prophets, Machiavelli himself, as if in fulfillment of the archetypal model Machiavelli had created . . . some of the awe and excitement the 'Horatian Ode' communicates flows from Marvell's shock at finding this theoretical figure fulfilled in reality, not in distant Italy, but in his own time and country" (17).

25. 1 Corinthians 1:27: "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty."