

SPECIAL REPORT

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It is fair to say, I think, that Marvell has long been neglected in the biographies and seminal studies of Oliver Cromwell and Sir Thomas Fairfax. There is little or nothing of Marvell to be found in the vast majority of Cromwell biographies (Abbott, Ashley, Davis, Gaunt, Hazlitt, and Morley, to name a few). And where he is given more purchase, in studies by John Buchan and Pauline Gregg, for instance, it is almost exclusively in reference to the “Horatian Ode” and the detail cannot always be said to be accurate.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, more has been evinced on Fairfax in the early 1650s by Marvellians than by Fairfacians, who, until Andrew Hopper’s recent biography of the Lord General, *Black Tom: Sir Thomas Fairfax and the English Revolution* (2007), had been noticeable by their absence.<sup>2</sup> But even in Hopper’s impressive volume, Marvell is given remarkably short shrift. Despite sharing the title of the tenth chapter alongside Anne Vere, Fairfax’s wife, Marvell receives barely two sides. With slim attendance to his works and the omission of the Latin poem “Epigramma in Duos Montes Amosclivum et Bilboreum,” the place of Marvell in Fairfax’s life receives no advancement from Clements Markham’s nineteenth-century tome, *A Life of the Great Lord Fairfax*.

All of this is surprising because of the exclusive position that Marvell holds and the unique witness that he brings to both Cromwell and Fairfax at such important times of their lives. There can be few better placed to witness the troubled years of Fairfax’s retirement in the early 1650s, when Marvell spent a period as a language tutor to the general’s daughter. And Marvell’s intimate elegy on Cromwell, withdrawn from publication at a late stage, shows that there were few better witnesses to Cromwell’s later life (and perhaps even his funeral) than Marvell himself. It reminds us that the poet’s association with Cromwell began in 1653, when he was ventriloquizing the general in a pair of Latin poems sent to Queen Christina of Sweden, and not at the point of his “official” appointment into government office in 1657.

It was invigorating, therefore, that Andrew Hopper and Philip Major, organisers of the quadricentennial *Fairfax 400 Conference* held at the University of Leicester, invited papers that addressed Fairfax’s understated literary endeavours—“the general’s favourite subject,” as Markham terms it—and the place of Marvell’s Nun Appleton verse in the Fairfax biography.<sup>3</sup> Over the two days, both attended by Edward Fairfax, heir apparent Lord Fairfax of Cameron, the wide scope of papers included a revised image of the formidable Anne Fairfax; insight into Fairfax’s governance of the Isle of Man; a critique of Fairfax in film; and an exploration of Fairfax’s interest in horse-breeding, on which he wrote a treatise. But a generous trio was dedicated to the literary and devotional interests of the Lord General and his daughter’s gifted language tutor, and it is these papers that will be summarised below.

Philip Major opened the event by speaking on Fairfax and the poetics of retirement. In doing so, he quickly established what would become a common theme for the literary papers: that the seemingly idyllic solitude belied a problematic retirement of tension and contradiction. Fairfax’s writing has often been dismissed or overlooked on account of its perceived stylistic weaknesses or impersonality. But this, Major argues, is to miss the point. Rather, the fact that he was composing such verse at all within the challenging psychological complexities of soldier-poet in retreat should remind us of the telling opportunities for self-analysis engrained within.

With the theme of solitude clearly evident in literature of the early 1650s, particularly in the translations of French libertine poet Saint Amant, it is clear that Fairfax’s under-explored

manuscript poetry, Bodleian MS Fairfax 40, engages with this tradition and becomes uniquely valuable as a source in determining his post-retirement reflections. Despite Saint Amant's damning verdict of the general in "Epigramme Endiablée sur Fairfax" as "inhuman," a "tyrant" and a "monster," Fairfax may have sought to align himself quite closely to the cause of the *libertin* poets through his own translation of "La solitude."<sup>4</sup> Even the opening line of this deserves attention, Major argues, because of its thoughtful departure from the original. Fairfax's use of the plural noun in "O how I love these Solitudes" rather than the original singular emphasises the "dynamic, changeable nature of the active-passive balance" that Fairfax discovered during the early years of his retirement. It also exemplifies his ability to exercise subtlety and poise in his literary endeavours. As Rory Tanner also identified, we find crucial moments of subjectivity from the most subtle of departures that Fairfax introduces into his translated work.

But the construction of his works is just as revealing as the content itself, says Major. Tensions between solitude and retirement are evident immediately through the division of Fairfax's works, which reflect variations on a theme. The devotional works, entitled "The Imployment of my Solitude," and the secular works, "The Recreation of my Solitude," demonstrate Fairfax's endorsement of the piety of "employment" and show the former general keen to affirm to himself that his approach to withdrawal was an active and progressive one. This is also evident through the heavy preference for devotional writing, which comprises 85% of the 650-page manuscript. The continuing activity of godliness and the state of sufferance, Major argues, shows an engagement and self-reflection that cannot be misconstrued as straightforward withdrawal from service.

Rory Tanner further advanced this theme by presenting on the shared devotions of Fairfax and Andrew Marvell. Part of the cathartic process for Fairfax post-retirement was in translating the Book of Psalms into verse, which he designed "for private use and then to oblivion."<sup>5</sup> This intension towards privacy is an obvious connection to make with Marvell, whose brief flirtation with print publication between 1648 and 1650 appears to have ground to a halt shortly after his arrival at Fairfax's estate. So for both men, but for Fairfax especially, a private record was to begin where the public record ended.

There are clear signs, Tanner believes, that Marvell showed his appreciation of Fairfax's devotional literary endeavours in both his published and unpublished work of this period. The last of Marvell's early print engagements, written on or around the time of his arrival at Nun Appleton, was a pair of commendatory poems to Robert Witty on his translation of James Primrose's *Popular Errours* in late 1650. To Tanner, Marvell's focus on translation in the English poem to Witty invites the possibility that he is also offering an oblique form of encouragement to his "worthy friend" Fairfax, and that the poem doubles as pedagogical commentary that Fairfax himself could follow in his own expansive translation efforts. This seems a more likely prospect still when the same language appears in a similarly suggestive scenario in "Upon Appleton House." Marvell's remark in the poem to Witty that "Others do strive with words and forcèd phrase" (l. 9), is recalled in the country house poem:

Humility alone designs  
 Those short but admirable lines,  
 By which, ungirt and unconstrained,  
 Things greater are in less contained.  
*Let others vainly strive t'immure*  
 The Circle in the Quadrature!  
 These holy mathematics can  
 In ev'ry figure equal man.  
 (ll. 41-48)<sup>6</sup>

Since Fairfax's psalms were markedly shorter on average than those of other translators, this stanza could be reprising Marvell's pedagogical stance to Witty to express a preference for his patron's concision in devotional translation. The "short but admirable lines" by which "things

greater are in less contain'd" certainly seem as apposite to Fairfax's literary endeavours within the walls as they do to the architecture that they ostensibly describe.

Not only does Fairfax's Psalter follow the precepts that Marvell afforded to Witty, Tanner believes, but its infrequent and subtle departures from the original texts also reveal moments of subjectivity that surmount to a form of spiritual autobiography. The language of weaponry in the metaphor of Psalm 18, for example, was given embellishment by Fairfax to depict military fortitude. "A bow of steel is broken by mine arms. Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation" (King James Version) is converted into "who made mine arm to break the steel'd ranks / In throngs confused me thy shield did save."<sup>7</sup> But the military theme that infiltrates Fairfax's translations did not extend to violence or retribution, which he noticeably omits. Rather, the Psalter is characterised by moments of guilt and self-recrimination, reflecting the varied and difficult preoccupations that were encountered following the return to Nun Appleton. The memory of conflict from the previous decade, as is equally evident from Marvell's verse of the period, could not be ignored; but facing his demons did not resolve the grave difficulties that Fairfax faced in coming to terms with the consequences.

My own paper completed the literary triangle by arguing that Marvell's three poems on Fairfax's grounds offer further detailed witness to the private man following his retirement. Key to Marvell's portrayal of the private Fairfax, I suggest, is the construction of the self through private property and its representations. But Marvell distorts this in perplexing ways, including geometry and through the use of glass, to suggest that crisis was never far away and that there could be no perfect means of legitimating the choices that Fairfax made.

Marvell's two poems on Almscliff and Bilbrough Hill demonstrate how "property and conscience both needed husbanding" in the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>8</sup> In "Epigramma in Duos Montes Amosclivum et Bilboreum," for example, the vast difference between the two landmarks empowers Fairfax's authority as Marvell unites the unlikely pair under the single master ("Dissimilis domino coiit Natura sub uno"). The juxtaposition between the threatening Almscliff Crag and the benign Bilbrough Hill, developed through chiasmus (ll. 9-12), reflects not only the similarly polarised personae of Fairfax in war and peace, but also, to some degree, poet and patron. Marvell might well have paused to reflect upon how, around the time of writing "Tom May's Death," he had ended up at the family home of the fearsome man he had previously branded "long deceived" in 1648 and an "architect" in the "Horatian Ode." But the captivated detail in the two poems suggests that he took inspiration from tours of Fairfax's grounds and that he savoured their remedial benefits alongside his troubled patron.

Meanwhile, in "Upon the Hill and Grove at Bilbrough," the sentient surroundings demonstrate togetherness as they uphold the "great Master's terror" (l. 38) and "the Genius of the house do bind" (l. 52). But equally they cast a frustrated voice at their scarcity without Fairfax's conquests, demonstrating a territorial desire to grow.

'Much other groves', say they, 'than these  
And other hills him once did please...

'For all the *civic* garlands due  
To him, *our* branches are but few.'  
(ll. 65-66, 69-70)

As mediator, Marvell assuages the trees' concerns by fortifying Fairfax's existing territory in retirement and defending peace as a courageous choice (l. 76). Property and selfhood are clearly meant to combine in these poems, where Fairfax's foreboding authority over his land carries a sense of self-sovereignty implicit in that state of ownership and occupancy. By differentiating between ambitious and humble forms of land and self, Marvell presents an owner capable of strong conscience and active proprietorship whilst retaining humility, which the poet later termed "the highest of all Christian qualifications."<sup>9</sup> But his defence of peace is not unconditional, and the grounds actively contribute towards the responsibility that Fairfax must face in retirement. Without ambition, he risked being upstaged and even shamed by nature's

greater concern for advancement than his own. And his territory must remain an active concern, Marvell hints in "Epigramma in Duos Montes" ("credas Montes extimulasse suos" [l. 20]), for his daughter's sake if not his own ("Parnassus cupiant esse Maria tuus" [l. 24]).

Marvell's construction of the private Fairfax is also strikingly visual. One method of achieving this is through geometry, which, more often than not, has a destabilising effect. In "Upon the Hill and Grove" the "perfect hemisphere" of Bilbrough Hill seems an ideal model for the Earth (ll. 1-8). But Marvell threatens a crisis in "Epigramma in Duos Montes" by imagining an assembly of mountains, Pelion and Ossa, stretching towards the heavens (ll. 11). And another unfathomable geometrical impasse follows in "Upon Appleton House":

Yet thus the laden house does sweat,  
And scarce endures the Master great:  
But, where he comes, the swelling hall  
Stirs, and the square grows spherical.  
(ll. 49-53)

The square, a dominant feature of both property and poem, is not made circular but spherical. The move from two to three dimensions develops the solipsism, the intimidating solitary private world of the individual man and mind. Seen as a symbol of steadfastness and solidity, the square was no longer feasible, perhaps, because of the incongruity between the perfectly honed private garden and the swelling disorder of its master's private conscience.

The use of glass and reflection also became significant several years before stains on the "polished mirrors" of Cromwell's armour provided iconoclastic fracture in the elegy of 1658. Reflection and vitrification are adjoined in two key areas of "Upon Appleton House." The first is in the meadows, where Marvell spies a band of Levellers.

They seem within the polished grass  
A landskip drawn in looking-glass.  
And shrunk in the huge pasture show  
As spots, so shaped, on faces do.  
(ll. 457-460)

Here, in the interplay of "glass" and "grass," the mirror counterposes the real and the artificial. The verbal design captures and frames the visual memory whilst simultaneously marginalising the Levellers, who appear reassuringly unthreatening in the world of art. And if Marvell sought pacification (or calm before the storm) through the mirrored picture, he finds order after chaos through the second key area of reflection in the poem: the entrance of Mary Fairfax.

But by her flames, in heaven tried,  
Nature is wholly vitrified.  
(ll. 687-688)

Like a sorceress, Mary humbles the poet's meagre power to frame one "landskip" by vitrifying nature in its entirety. Vitrium and the specular, as tropes in Marvell's poem, add a dimension of selfhood found more commonly in visual art, where the mirror "lends itself to self-examination and interior dialogue."<sup>10</sup> The poet's examination of the properties of reflection finds that it generates a version of the subjective self. So, once reflection becomes omnipresent, thanks to the vitrifying powers of perspective offered by Mary, both Marvell and his patron must encounter the clearest picture of dilemma and doubt as reflected in their own literary works and personal privacy.

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The papers by Major and Tanner provide a welcome appraisal of Fairfax's underappreciated and nuanced literary endeavours, with his conscientious and carefully personalised translation work possibly inspired by his new tutor's guidance. But perhaps we learn more of Fairfax's troubled experience through Marvell's own approach. The poet forges a spectrum of action and retirement while simultaneously problematizing it with different modes of engagement and circumstances of withdrawal. A poet can evade war yet somehow consider himself legitimately engaged through writing; an ex-army leader of distinguished service can find crisis in the humane decision to withdraw. It's not inconceivable that Marvell joined Oliver St John's ambassadorial entourage in Holland in early 1651—effectively swapping roles with Fairfax—before returning in the summer with a matured understanding of the values of the public and private life.<sup>11</sup> But even so, it's clear to Marvell, I think, through Fairfax's sacrifices, that any constant amongst the tribulations of *otium* and *negotium* was to be found in the private household and family—something the poet noticeably lacked himself. So, just as we find in Fairfax's own literary endeavours, Marvell's Nun Appleton poems find no easy escape from conscience and no right or wrong courses of action, only consequences to be suffered by any choice or commitment. Such is the moral cost of revolution.

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<sup>1</sup> Gregg, for example, states that Marvell “published” the Ode before vanishing to Nun Appleton, despite the absence of physical evidence. Pauline Gregg, *Oliver Cromwell* (London: Dent, 1988), 280.

<sup>2</sup> With the exception of Luke Daxon, “The Politics of Fairfax Reassessed,” *History* (2005): 486-506.

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Philip Major and Rory Tanner for sharing their papers with me in advance of preparing this script, and also to Andrew Hopper, who has offered useful feedback and encouragement on my research.

<sup>4</sup> *Oeuvres Complètes de Saint-Amant*, cited in Edward Bliss Reed, *The Poems of Thomas Lord Fairfax* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1909), 247.

<sup>5</sup> MSS Fairfax 38, v.

<sup>6</sup> All references to Marvell’s verse are taken from Nigel Smith, ed., *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, rev. ed. (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, eds., *The Bible: Authorised King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 648.

<sup>8</sup> Laura Brace, *The Idea of Property in Seventeenth-Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 152.

<sup>9</sup> Annabel Patterson et al., eds., *The Prose Works of Andrew Marvell, Vol. 2* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 159.

<sup>10</sup> Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History*, trans. Katherine H. Jewett (London: Routledge, 2002), 126-127.

<sup>11</sup> See Blair Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England: John Milton, Andrew Marvell, Marchamont Nedham* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 399-404.