PROPOSAL
Loyalty to *Leviathan*:
Andrew Marvell’s Politics in the Cromwellian Poems

In 2010, Nigel Smith published a biography of Andrew Marvell subtitled *The Chameleon*—a subtitle which seems to aptly encapsulate one of the prevailing notions about Andrew Marvell’s political convictions: that he was capable of arranging his beliefs so that he was all things to all men. The accusation is fairly straightforward: when political necessity required a Royalist, Marvell penned Royalist verses; when a Parliamentarian or a Republican (or a Royalist, again) was required, so the verses were made to suit the time. But Nigel Smith, despite the provocative subtitle, does not entirely subscribe to this notion; the common thread in his biography is not self-serving accommodation but *liberty*: indeed, he concludes by saying that “Marvell stands for liberty.”

If Smith is at all on the right track—and I assert that he is—then liberty and politics must be of central importance to any study of Marvell’s poetry in general, and of his Cromwellian poetry (the most political of his poems) in particular. After all, it is unthinkable to argue that the Cromwellian poems are *not* in some way inherently political. Once this premise it accepted, another rapidly follows: that
Marvell’s seemingly unique political thought was surely not the product of a vacuum. Seventeenth-century English political debate was a deeply philosophical and theological matter, and perhaps no contemporary philosopher could be said to have been as influential in the developing concept of the English state as was Thomas Hobbes. The political philosophy of Hobbes, embodied in *Leviathan*, establishes the concept of a strong, protective ruler who governs only with the support of the governed, all set within the frame of Christian theology. Marvell, too, seems to subscribe to this notion: so much so, in fact, that the political philosophy of the Cromwellian poems seems to be the political philosophy of *Leviathan* and Hobbes.

Despite the ready connexions which may be drawn between *Leviathan* and Marvell’s political poetry, there has been virtually no academic examination of these works in relation to each other. Therefore, this paper will endeavour to push Marvell scholarship forward by seeking not only to argue that evidence of Marvell’s personal political ideology—as differentiated from mere partisan affiliation—is necessarily present in the Cromwellian poems; but more importantly, that it is a political ideology which is intricately related to the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. Indeed, it may even be said that there is a necessary connexion between the two oeuvres.
This paper will use three of Marvell’s poems as the lens through which to examine his political philosophy: *An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell’s Return from Ireland, The First Anniversary of the Government under His Highness the Lord Protector,* and *A Poem upon the Death of His Late Highness the Lord Protector.* Evidence of other contemporary political movements will be addressed, as will biographical studies of Marvell, with especial attention given to his political beliefs. This paper will employ the most modern scholarship on the topic (the aforementioned Nigel Smith biography, for example), but will by no means exclude older works considered fundamental to a study of Marvell (such as Pierre Legouis’ 1928 biography, still widely acclaimed as absolutely essential to any beginning student of Marvell).

The text of Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* will be used as the central point of philosophical reference for the political evaluation of Marvell. Due to constraints of length, the specific examination of *Leviathan* as it stands, without reference to Marvell, will be brief, but by no means cursory or superficial. And, rather than being divided into two, author-focused sections, this paper will naturally involve elements of both in the forms of comparison and contrast—for the primary intent is to show the necessity of the links between Marvell and Hobbes. This paper will argue that such a view is fundamental to understanding what the three poems say about their author and the time in which he lived.
Tentative Bibliography


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