

## Marvell's Now<sup>1</sup>

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*Alice* and *Through the Looking-Glass* involve a category of very special things: events, pure events. When I say “Alice becomes larger,” I mean that she becomes larger than she was. By the same token, however, she becomes smaller than she is now. Certainly, she is not bigger and smaller at the same time. She is larger now; she was smaller before. But it is at the same moment that one becomes larger than one was and smaller than one becomes. This is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present.<sup>2</sup>

Andrew Marvell's complex panegyric celebrating Cromwell's return from Ireland begins with the fateful moment of decision, even if it is not immediately clear to whom the decision belongs (or upon whom it is thrust):

The forward youth that would appear  
Must now forsake his muses dear,  
Nor in the shadows sing  
His numbers languishing.  
'Tis time to leave the books in dust,  
And oil the unused armour's rust:  
Removing from the wall  
The corslet of the hall.<sup>3</sup> (lines 1-8)

If the subsequent line – “So restless Cromwell could not cease” – identifies the “forward youth” with the man who might be king, the poem initially suggests (as commentators have noted) a different identification: with the poet who now steps out from the shadows, the private and hidden spaces of love poetry and book-filled study, abandoning his erstwhile

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<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Diana Henderson and Stephen Tapscott for their suggestions and comments. I wish also to acknowledge Jonathan Reinharth, an undergraduate student of mine, whose seminar essay triggered my interest in the topic of Marvell's attitude to time – though my argument follows a very different path from his.

<sup>2</sup>Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>3</sup>Andrew Marvell, “An Horatian Ode on Cromwell's Return from Ireland,” in Elizabeth Story Donno (ed.), *Andrew Marvell: The Complete Poems* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1976), 55. All subsequent citations of Marvell's poems will refer to this edition.

muses to enter a public space.<sup>4</sup> And this entry is likened to military dressing and engagement. To don the “corslet of the hall” is to take up an armour that not only resides in or decorates the public space but belongs to it, standing metonymically for the kind of engagement that “must now” be undertaken by both Cromwell and poet. Reading the “So” of line nine as “thus” or “in such a manner” sets the seal on the implied alignment between the poet’s imperative in the present and the political restlessness that drove Cromwell from the “inglorious arts of peace” to “adventurous war” (lines 10-11). Alternatively, reading the “So” as “therefore” aligns the precocious Cromwell more closely with the “forward” youth, construing the litany of his achievements that follow as exempla, instantiations in the past of the kinds of decision that now, in the historical present, stand before the man again (and by extension face the poet who would appear to record them).

One effect of the imperative to decide – weighing on both Cromwell and the poet – is to draw into sharp relief the peculiar status of the “now,” the present moment whose pressure opens the poem. Gilles Deleuze’s remarks on Alice (quoted as my epigraph) may well apply to the Cromwell of Marvell’s Horatian Ode. The characteristic double-edgedness of Marvell’s tone ensures – if the range of critical commentary on the poem serves as a guide – that Cromwell, too, becomes at the same moment both larger and smaller. And this paradox of his becoming seems integrally related to the ambiguities of the present, to tensions conveyed by the complexities of the poem’s “now.”

David Norbrook’s acute reading of the Ode captures some of the energies released by the word. He points out that the initial “now” surprisingly leads without pause into the past of Cromwell’s actions and their consequences. “Readers may well think they have strayed into the wrong poem, until at line 73 they return to the initial ‘now,’ the present tense traditionally deemed appropriate for ceremonial poetry.”<sup>5</sup> And even the delayed return to the present of the Irish conquest from which Cromwell is triumphantly returning turns out to be a brief halt indeed, since the poem immediately leaps “forward” to the future, to prophesize about European victories. The Ode yet again “reverts to a ‘now’” in line 105, but this final turn to the word is, Norbrook argues, “not ceremonial but persuasive, the immediate urgency of the war with the Scots” that is yet to come. The pressure of this future campaign retroactively shapes the decision with which the poem began, turning it

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<sup>4</sup>For instance, see Margarita Stocker’s description of the poem’s opening: “From these shadows war invites him [the poet] to ‘appear,’ to take part in the lighted arena of public events.” *Apocalyptic Marvell: The Second Coming in Seventeenth Century Poetry* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1986), 74.

<sup>5</sup>David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 256. All subsequent citations will be indicated by page number in the body of this essay. Despite my differences with Norbrook’s argument at various points, my reading of Marvell remains indebted to his rich and exhaustive analysis of the period and the literature it produced.

into “a Machiavellian injunction to decisive action, to seize the *occasione*” (257).<sup>6</sup>

Norbrook offers his reading of the Horatian Ode as a corrective to those that assimilate Marvell’s Commonwealth poetic oeuvre with his writings during the Protectorate and beyond, as well as to those that see in the poem a royalist nostalgia (especially in the contrast between Cromwell’s “prosaic ruthlessness” (245) and the scene of Charles’ execution).<sup>7</sup> Tying the poem more tightly to “the very specific dilemmas of public poets under the Commonwealth” (243), Norbrook insists that there are sufficient grounds to read the Ode’s depiction of Cromwell straight, namely, as a glorification in tune with what many other contemporary writers were saying and doing. Certainly, the poem is laden with irony but, Norbrook argues, the irony is directed less at the central figure than at the King himself, since it exposes “the hollowness of the royalist satire of Cromwell by placing [the King] at the centre of his [that is, Cromwell’s] triumphal ode” (251). The Ode’s paradoxes do not reflect, then, a Marvell divided between royalist nostalgia and the brute reality of a militaristic republicanism; rather, its Cromwell “straddles the divide” between two forms of republicanism, balancing “the highly moralistic language of civic humanism” against “the more self-consciously ‘scientific’ language of those who defended the regicide by an appeal to practical necessity” (263). Consequently, its understanding of the eponymous hero is “less ironic than carefully analytic, exploring the complexities of agency” (265).<sup>8</sup>

There is much of value in this careful analysis, but the reading is vitiated by a simplification that violates Norbrook’s own salutary injunction that we not ascribe “consistency” to Marvell’s Commonwealth verse “at the cost of losing the passionate energy of these poems” (244). While he shows the inconsistency in Marvell’s political positions across a number of poems in this period, he nonetheless implicitly attributes an internal political consistency

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<sup>6</sup>Joseph Mazzeo makes an analogous point in “Cromwell as Machiavellian Prince in Marvell’s ‘An Horatian Ode,’” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21 (1960), 1-17. This Machiavellian impulse may be fruitfully compared to a parallel instance in “To his Coy Mistress,” where the consequences of refusal – “The grave’s a fine and private place, / But none, I think, do there embrace” (lines 31-32) – motivate the demand to seize the “now”: “Now, therefore, while the youthful glue / Sits on thy skin like morning dew / . . . / Now let us sport while me may; / And now, like amorous birds of prey, / Rather at once our time devour” (line 32ff; emphases mine).

<sup>7</sup>Against the former, Norbrook emphasizes specific differences within the language of republicanism throughout the period – in the words of his book’s introduction, “‘Republicanism’ was not a fixed identity” (18). Against the latter, he purports to show that the poem’s nostalgia is not for royalism in any form but instead “calls for and embodies a ‘recovery’ of lost political and rhetorical energies in the spirit of a group of republican writers around Milton” (250).

<sup>8</sup>In this, Norbrook partly echoes Chernaik, for whom both the Horatian Ode and ‘Upon Appleton House’ “are works of historical analysis, seeking not to inculcate a particular attitude, but to present a problem in all its complexity, to indicate the choices facing men at a given historical moment.” See Warren L. Chernaik, *The Poet’s Time: Politics and Religion in the Work of Andrew Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 13. Norbrook would deny, however, that this attitude implies that the Ode is politically uncommitted – on the contrary, the analytical serves the ends of persuasion.

to each poem itself.<sup>9</sup> In fact, his interpretation of the Horatian Ode preserves the “critical paradigm” of an opposition between “royalist civility” and “republican violence” that the poem invites and indeed helped create (249): the difference is simply that this opposition is read not as evidence of Marvell’s royalist nostalgia but as critique of that nostalgia. For Norbrook, the internal tensions of the poem arise rather from within the republican camp to which Marvell is firmly assigned. But even granting this, it still remains unclear from Norbrook’s intricate discussion of Marvell’s affiliations during the Commonwealth years whether the alleged adherence in the Ode to the republican cause in general – regardless of its particular stripe – was quite so assured and stable. Certainly, whatever Marvell’s own beliefs may have been, the reception of these poems by contemporary readers doesn’t unequivocally indicate his identification in their eyes with republicanism.<sup>10</sup>

In short, even if we accept Norbrook’s reading of Marvell’s attempts to negotiate internal differences in the republican camp during the Commonwealth years, we need not thereby refuse Marvell the slightest whiff of royalist nostalgia. And we certainly not deny it on some of the grounds that Norbrook provides as a substitute: “it was possible [for contemporary republican writers] to acknowledge the elements of beauty in pre-war courtly culture.” Marvell’s portrait of the king’s demise goes beyond the poem’s putative association of “courtly elegance” with “a certain evasion of difficult realities” (266).<sup>11</sup> My purpose here, however, is not to return to the hoary question of whether or not the poem evinces royalist sympathies;

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<sup>9</sup>Blair Worden elegantly captures the difficulty of categorising Marvell: “in 1650, Marvell was twenty-nine. To simplify, he was a Royalist before that year, and a Cromwellian and then a Whig after it. Marvell, as always, resists such simplification.” See “Marvell, Cromwell, and the Horatian Ode,” in Kevin Sharpe & Steven N. Zwicker (eds.), *Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 150. Although my reading of the Ode follows a very different path from Worden’s, I find his interpretation closest to mine in its general sense of the poem and of Marvell’s sensibility.

<sup>10</sup>While acknowledging that the question of Marvell’s political allegiance in this period is subject to “considerable uncertainty,” Stocker suggests that “it is thought probable that by 1648 or 1649 Marvell was moving in London literary circles that would have been largely royalist in sympathy” – a probability supported for her by the arguably royalist leanings of two 1648 poems, ‘To his Noble Friend Mr Richard Lovelace’ and the elegy upon Lord Francis Villiers’ death. In: *Apocalyptic Marvell*, 6. That Marvell’s Horatian Ode was, as Norbrook tells us, “linked” in the Restoration “above all with his other poems to Cromwell, turning him into the court poet of a pseudo-king” does not seem to me simply a consequence of his “covering his tracks” with remarkable success. Nor does it seem obvious that this affiliation would unambiguously aid his subsequent canonization as the poet of “the monarchical liberty of 1688 rather than the republican liberty of 1649” (243). It seems as likely that there was enough “in” his poems of this period and later – and especially when read alongside the vicious satire on Tom May’s turn to the republican side – to indicate that Marvell’s speech acts in this period may be (self-consciously) inconsistent not only across the poems, but within each poem itself, creating lines of flight that can be arrested at different points in the political spectrum.

<sup>11</sup>Compare Chernaik, who sees this portrait as “Marvell’s tribute to the doomed civilization, whose values find their clearest expression in defeat. An aristocrat may be defined as one who knows how to die gracefully.” In: *The Poet’s Time*, 16.

rather, I raise the problem anew only to indicate its undecideability on some level, and to suggest that such an undecideability in a poem whose focus is on the very moment of decision cannot be (entirely) accidental.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, the suspension of decision within the Ode seems to be fundamentally caught up in what I wish to call the poem's untimeliness, one expression of which we have seen in the forwardness and backwardness of its "now." Marvell's peculiar – in its root sense of "belonging to a person" (OED) – untimeliness itself constitutes a distinctive response to a surrounding and constitutive cultural untimeliness that pervades his present, dividing the now from itself. This dimension is one that Norbrook clearly sees – even if his readings sometimes drift away from that insight – when he speaks of "the uncertain position of contemporaries for whom the political horizon was bafflingly open and the meanings of new political formation were constantly uncertain" (15).

The words of two such contemporaries cited by Norbrook may help bring home the untimeliness of that mid-century "now." A 1641 speech by George, Lord Digby offers diametrically opposed images of the state of the nation:

Take into your view Gentlemen, a State in a state of the greatest quiet and security that can be fancied, not only enjoying the calmest peace itself, but to improve and secure its happy condition, all the rest of the world at the same time in Tempest, in Combustions, in uncomposible Wars . . . A King that had in his own time given all the Rights and Liberties of his Subjects a more clear and ample confirmation freely and graciously, than any of his Predecessors (when the people had them at advantage) extortedly, I mean in the *Petition of Right*.

This is one Map of *England*, Mr *Speaker*, A man Sir, that should present unto you now, a Kingdom, groaning under that supreme Law, which *Salus populi periclitata* would enact. The Liberty, the property of the Subject fundamentally subverted, ravished away by the violence of a pretended necessity; a triple Crown shaken with distempers; men of the best Conscience ready to fly into the wilderness for Religion. Would not one swear that this were the Antipodes to other; and yet let me tell you *Mr. Speaker*, this is a Map of *England* too, and both at the same time true.<sup>13</sup>

This acute sense of a present and a world that has doubled upon itself, the negative image superimposed upon the positive – indeed, often without seconding Digby's view of which

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<sup>12</sup>Though perhaps even to put it thus is to prejudge the issue since what is at stake (as we shall see) is in part the question of contingency, of the accident.

<sup>13</sup>*The Speeches of the Lord Digby* (London, 1641), 14-15. Cited in Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 69-70. I have modernised the spelling.

might be which – generates in turn a different untimeliness. The pressure of an uncertain future palpable in the present frequently opens up an apocalyptic sense of virtually unfettered possibility.<sup>14</sup> The radical Kentish lawyer Sir Cheney Culpeper, for instance, writes in 1644 to Samuel Hartlib that

though this present age have so much reverence to our own or ancestors wisdom as every thing . . . if new to us . . . finds as yet a difficult passage in men’s thoughts; yet from the three years’ liberty which men have taken of ransacking and tousing [i.e., handling roughly] those starched up and unjointed postures (wherein our ancestors left us like so many images without motion but from without) I cannot but conceive we shall by degrees (having first freed ourselves from a slavish reverence of some few men or books) try every spirit and that as well in rational as spiritual things.<sup>15</sup>

As Norbrook puts succinctly puts it, Culpeper’s words communicate the sense of “living in a time of sudden acceleration, when changes he might have hoped to see in a distant future suddenly seemed plausible” (18).<sup>16</sup> But even on the Parliamentary side, hope alternated, Blair Worden notes, with “panic and despair.” One member of Parliament “committed suicide on the first anniversary of the king’s execution, 30 January 1650; another died the following month after depression about the regicide; a third found himself ‘full of melancholy and apprehensions of death’; Lord General Fairfax was said to be ‘melancholy mad’; and the army officers wondered whether God had turned against them.”<sup>17</sup>

Against the background of this experiential uncertainty, then, of a world divided between horror and hope, let us examine more closely the Ode’s temporal movements. As we have seen, the “now” of the opening lines takes us first into the past, recounting from “the

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<sup>14</sup>The anticipated event of the Apocalypse becomes, for Margarita Stocker, the magic key to unlock all of Marvell’s writings, and indeed the period as a whole. This leads to the sweeping assertion that “[b]y the 1640s, the decade of the Civil War, the majority of Englishmen might be described as chiliasts. Revelation, the biblical book of the war against Antichrist, was regarded as a textbook for contemporary events and politics.” See Stocker, *Apocalyptic Marvell*, 2. Such expansiveness virtually empties the idea of chiliasm of content. Fortunately, one can make space for a toned-down claim to capture both the widespread uncertainty prevalent at the time and the experience of major changes in the fabric of English society.

<sup>15</sup>M. J. Braddick and Mark Greengrass (eds.), *The Letters of Sir Cheney Culpeper, 1641-1657* in *Seventeenth-Century Political and Financial Papers*, Camden 5th Series VII (1996), 204. Cited in Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 123. I have modernised the spelling.

<sup>16</sup>The shifting political allegiances of individuals from the 1640s through to the Restoration and beyond have been demonstrated by a number of critics, including Norbrook. In Stocker’s tongue-in-cheek formulation, “it is difficult to say whether conviction or mere policy provided the dominant motivation for such shifts, but one can say, with certainty, that those who lived through the Civil War were themselves confused by events.” See *Apocalyptic Marvell*, 8.

<sup>17</sup>Worden, “Marvell, Cromwell, and the Horatian Ode,” 152.

dark backward and abysm of time” (to borrow Prospero’s memorable phrase) a “forward” progression that begins with Cromwell’s “adventurous war” (line 11) and culminates in his toppling the monarch: “And Caesar’s head at last / Did through his laurels blast” (lines 23-24).<sup>18</sup> The next section of the poem in effect recapitulates this already completed narrative more concretely: as the story of the man who leaves “his private gardens” (line 29) of repose to create the conditions that result, at the poem’s very centre, in Charles’ “try[ing]” “the axe’s edge” (line 60). To the extent that a ‘now’ may be said to inhabit this history, it occurs in a present tense that takes a very different form from what (initially) seemed the very specific now of the poem’s opening lines. Thus, the poet tells us that “‘Tis madness to resist or blame / The force of angry heaven’s flame” (lines 25-26), and amplifies upon this sentiment a little further on:

Though justice against fate complain,  
 And plead the ancient rights in vain:  
 But those do hold or break  
 As men are strong or weak.  
 Nature, that hateth emptiness,  
 Allows of penetration less:  
 And therefore must make room  
 Where greater spirits come. (Lines 37-42)

What is evoked in these instances via the present tense is an iron necessity, expressed as the “force” of natural law – nature abhors a vacuum and tolerates even less the attempt of two bodies to occupy the same space – and testified to by an inexorable logic (“therefore”). In other words, the present tense seems used here for something akin to a cosmic present, the universal Now that underwrites and supports all specific nows. Instead of a singular moment of decision we face laws before which all decision-making must, like Charles his head, bow.<sup>19</sup>

This movement brings us to the verge of the Ode’s second “now,” a temporal marker affixed to the specific occasion the poem ostensibly celebrates, that of Cromwell’s return from Ireland: “And *now* the Irish are ashamed / To see themselves in one year tamed” (lines 73-

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<sup>18</sup>Note, too, the odd untimeliness of this comparison between Charles I and Caesar. These lines connect the king’s decapitation with the moment marking the *fall of the Roman Republic*, whereas the later evocation of Charles’ “bleeding head” signals the (possible) rise of the *English Republic*.

<sup>19</sup>The most expansive (and one-sided) insistence on this dimension of necessity is Wallace’s. He sees “loyalism” – in the sense of an acquiescence to the sheer fact of power – as the fundamental moral principle underwriting everything that Marvell composed. See John M. Wallace, *Destiny His Choice: The Loyalty of Andrew Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968). By contrast, Chernaik emphasises that the Horatian Ode coordinates two different aspects: “an amoral Fortune and a Fate indifferent to human ideas of justice,” on the one hand, and Christian providence, on the other. See *The Poet’s Time*, 18.

74; emphasis mine). But bridging the gap between the moment of Charles' decapitation and this present one demands a complex temporal manoeuvre. It involves re-writing the present moment as the fulfilment of a prophecy symbolized by the head of the king. Likening the king's head to the "bleeding head" encountered at the founding of the temple of Jupiter Capitolum, the poem transfers the prophetic implications of that discovery to this moment that marks the founding of the English Republic ("And yet in that the State / Foresaw its happy fate"). Going back to the future of an earlier republic licenses the return to now, representing the present of the Republic as an instantiation of a futurity buried deep in the past. We might note, too, a further irony the future held in store – one not yet available to Marvell though perhaps nonetheless glimpsed by him: that the Republic was fated eventually to turn into an Empire.

From the "now" of Cromwell's return, the Ode hereafter reverses its strategy. If the opening of the poem led to past conditions that make possible the present, this now leads instead to the future, as a repetition of the present in which Cromwell "to the Commons' feet presents / A kingdom, for his first year's rents" (lines 85-86). What is to come first takes the form of an open future, expressed as the general promise of victories to be won:

A Caesar, he, ere long to Gaul  
 To Italy an Hannibal,  
 And to all states not free  
 Shall climacteric be. [Lines 101-4]

And then we are offered a more specific form, the immediate campaign against the Scots, where we encounter the third and final "now" of the Ode: "The Pict no shelter *now* shall find / Within his parti-coloured mind" (lines 105-6; emphasis mine).

While this section of the Ode broadly looks forward in time to victories to come, its directedness to the future does not, however, take an entirely linear form. Embedded within it is the famous image of Cromwell as the falcon circling back from his kill to perch on the green bough to which he has been "lured" by the falconer. How "sure" (line 96) the falcon will remain "still in the Republic's hand" (line 82) may perhaps be in some doubt,<sup>20</sup> but the urgency of action against the recalcitrant – and now frightened – Scots allows the poem to end by merging the immediate present of a renewed campaign with the cosmic present that Cromwell, "the Wars' and Fortune's son" (line 113), embodies. Thus the "now" of line 105

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<sup>20</sup>Critics have often noted the poem's tenuous balance with regard to the relationship between Cromwell and the Republic he ostensibly serves. For instance, see R. H. Syfret, "Marvell's 'Horatian Ode,'" *Review of English Studies* 12 (1961), 160; and Cleanth Brooks, "Marvell's 'Horatian Ode,'" in John Carey (ed.), *Andrew Marvell* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), 191-2.



draws close to the permanent condition of natural law, evoked again in the poem's famous closing couplet: "The same arts that did gain / A power, must it maintain" (lines 119-120). Indeed, the collapsing of particular and universal present tenses retroactively colours the moment of decision with which the Ode had opened. As Norbrook puts it, "[t]he stress on natural laws retrospectively raises questions about the 'Must' of line 2: what at first sounded like a moral imperative turns out to be no more than an impersonal necessity" (265).

If nothing else, close attention to the Ode's chronological sequence brings out an inherent untimeliness, expressed in how the poem repeatedly puts chronology under pressure. There are, no doubt, domains of time we can identify; pasts, presents and futures can be laid out in their succession. Equally, however, the poem works against such ordering, repeatedly effecting temporal swerves that resist the demands of chronology even as they seem to uphold its necessity. This necessity ultimately takes the form, as we have seen, of an order imposed by natural law: the "must" of maintaining a power by the same arts that gained it. But even here one cannot entirely avoid sensing an internal resistance to nature's law of succession (be it of time or lineage). This resistance becomes evident in the circularity lying just below the surface of the poem's concluding lines. In that the final couplet specifies the reasons why Cromwell must "still keep [his] sword erect," the "arts" would appear to be those associated with wielding the weapon: thus, "it" is also a kind of power that "maintains" the "arts" that gain a power which they must then maintain.<sup>21</sup>

In short, far from being the inevitable shape of temporality, chronological time – and more particularly, the forward impetus of necessity – seems instead a fraught and unstable construct. Let us therefore explore the possibility that chronological time in the poem appears as the surface effect of a different kind or understanding of temporality, one more attuned to time's divagations and their consequences. To establish this alternative model, I draw on Gilles Deleuze's reconstruction of Stoic temporality in *The Logic of Sense*. For there is also a "now" pertaining to moments of decision and action that encompasses the poem as a whole. This "living present," in Deleuze's words, "is the temporal extension which accompanies the act, expresses and measures the action of the agent and the passion of the patient."<sup>22</sup> We experience a comparable sense of time as an ongoing action, for instance, in the description of Cromwell as a bolt of lightning "breaking the clouds where it was nursed," "burning through the air" to destroy palaces and temples until he "Caesar's head at last / Did through his laurels blast" (see lines 13-24). While these events are doubtless located in the past, the verbal form of present participles ("burning," "breaking") nonetheless

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<sup>21</sup>As Chernaik puts it, "Cromwell's right to power lies only in his possession of it." See *The Poet's Time*, 22.

<sup>22</sup>Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 4.

conveys the sense of an extended present, of an ongoing activity. The conflation of the chronological place of these events with their continuing participation in an extended present is powerfully captured by the fact that Marvell expresses the past through the auxiliary (as in “did . . . divide” or “did . . . blast”) rather than through the verb denoting the act – and indeed through an auxiliary that stresses the very fact of action, the doing. Nor is this mode of temporality restricted to an agent such as Cromwell: Deleuze’s description of the “living present” stresses that it is equally in such a now that bodies patiently suffer their fates, receiving upon themselves the actions of other bodies. Marvell’s image of Charles confirms this insight, as he “with his keener eye, / The axe’s edge did try” (lines 59-60). (The interchange between activity and passivity, agent and patient, is a recurring feature of the Horatian Ode, and one to which I shall return shortly.)

Nevertheless, despite its different emphasis, the logic of an enveloping present of bodies and actions does not deny past and future. Rather than conceiving time as the successive dimensions of past, present and future, Stoic temporality offers instead “two simultaneous readings of time.”

[T]ime must grasped twice, in two complementary though mutually exclusive fashions. First, it must be grasped entirely as the living present in which bodies act and are acted upon. Second, it must be grasped entirely as an entity infinitely divisible into past and future, and into the incorporeal effects which result from bodies, their actions and their passions.<sup>23</sup>

I have dwelt thus far on the first of these modalities. But the consequences of Charles’ decapitation reveal, too, the second fundamental form of Stoic temporality operative in the Ode: a time of effects. Reconsider in this light the prophecy that succeeds the “memorable hour / Which first assured the forced power” (lines 65-66):

So when they did design  
The Capitol’s first line,  
A bleeding head where they begun,  
Did fright the architects to run;  
And yet in that the State  
Foresaw its happy fate. (Lines 67-72)

Elizabeth Story Donno’s notes to the poem point out that the adjective “bleeding” is original to Marvell’s telling of the story – as is the architects’ fright at seeing the head. In Livy’s

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<sup>23</sup>Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 5.

account, the excavators turn up “a man’s head, face and all, whole and sound: which sight . . . plainly foretold that [Rome] should be the chief castle of the empire and the capital place of the whole world.”<sup>24</sup> For Livy, the wholeness and soundness of the head, and the visibility of the face are crucial to the prophetic conclusion: these characteristics directly signify Rome’s “capital” position in the world. In Marvell, however, the grammatical structure does not posit a necessary connection between the *condition* of the found object and the State it foretells. It is rather the parallel with Livy’s story that underpins the foretelling: just as finding a head foretold Rome’s centrality, so in another head we foresee the fate of our State. Undoubtedly, the blood (and the architects’ fright) does possess a direct signifying function as well – and, if anything, such a connection casts doubt on the “happiness” of the future State. I shall return to that irony later, but for the moment I wish to attend to the structural logic of Marvell’s lines. Marvell’s distinctive reworking of the legend correlates two associative chains, one completed in the past, the other indicating the future. In the past, one head is linked to a particular state of affairs that has already come to pass (the centrality of the Roman republic). In turn, assimilating one head to another motivates an analogy with that past, allowing the “living present” of Charles’ decapitation to be linked to a future state of affairs (the happy fate of the English State). As a consequence, the moment of Charles’ execution finds itself internally divided by past and by future; it functions as an intermediate moment that enables the (known) effects of a past to be projected onto the (desired) effects of what is yet to come. On the one hand, then, we meet a living present – of bodies, actions, and states of affairs – which, in Deleuze’s words, “exists in time and gathers together or absorbs the past and future.” But there is also a time of events and effects such that “the past and the future inhere in time and divide each present infinitely.”<sup>25</sup>

In the “now” of bodies and states of affairs, the lightning that is Cromwell burns the air, destroys palaces and temples. In this present, too, the eye tries the axe’s edge, the head bows upon a bed. But the incorporeal now of effects – while depending upon these collisions among bodies – reveals a different mode of the temporal. A now repeatedly divided by past and future, it expresses a dynamic of transformation, of pure becoming. The name “Cromwell” in the Ode belongs above all to this latter time: it indicates the “event” of Cromwell with which the poem contends. If Cromwell – like the Alice of my epigraph – simultaneously appears both larger and smaller, pulling at the same time towards past and future, this paradox fundamentally derives from the Ode’s concern with him as event, as

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<sup>24</sup>Livy, *Annals* I. 55. 6, tr. Philemon Holland (London, 1600), Elv. Cited from Donno (ed.), *Andrew Marvell: The Complete Poems*, 240.

<sup>25</sup>Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 5.

a “becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present.”<sup>26</sup> A particularly neat instance of this dynamic may be found in the poem’s description of Cromwell’s transformation from private individual to force of nature:

And, if we would speak true,  
Much to the man is due,  
Who, from his private gardens, where  
He lived reserved and austere,  
As if his highest plot  
To plant the bergamot,  
Could by industrious valour climb  
To ruin the great work of time,  
And cast the kingdoms old  
Into another mould. (Lines 27-36)

Lauding Cromwell’s “climb” through which “kingdoms old” are cast “into another mould” raises the “private” man, makes him larger than he was. Cromwell’s industry outdoes even the labour that time has performed (its “great work”), and in the process he becomes the “greater spirit” facing whom even “Nature . . . must make room” (see lines 41-44).<sup>27</sup> But at the same time the cited lines convey the contrary sense that the speaker is somehow forced by circumstances into praising the man: “And, if we would speak true / Much to the man is due.” This impression is compounded by the truly dazzling description of the earlier Cromwell as a man whose “highest plot” was “to plant the bergamot”:<sup>28</sup> the gap between the two heights reduces him as well (as does the near oxymoronic phrase “industrious valour”). Neither position proves to be stable, for the speaker’s reluctance also produces the opposite effect. While the praise is oddly grudging, the effect of Cromwell’s transformation becomes all the more powerful precisely *because* it seems extracted against the speaker’s will. And yet, the remarked-upon distance between the Cromwell who “plots” to plant herbs and the one who weaves plots “of such a scope / That Charles himself might chase / To Carisbrooke’s narrow case” (lines 50-52) does not thereby disappear entirely. Rather the conjunction reduces Cromwell to mere man – albeit a heroic one, as the “deepest scars” (line 46) received on the

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<sup>26</sup>Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 1.

<sup>27</sup>Marvell’s later celebration of Cromwell as Lord Protector in “The First Anniversary” associates Cromwell’s achievements with the great work of time, suggesting the extent to which his political allegiances have firmed in the interim: “’Tis he the force of scattered time contracts, / And in one year the work of ages acts” (lines 13-14).

<sup>28</sup>There is a further irony here in that the bergamot pear was apparently traditionally associated with kingship. See W. R. Orwen, “Marvell’s bergamot,” *Notes & Queries* (Aug. 1955), 340-41.

battlefield signal<sup>29</sup> – even as it elevates him to the level of fate itself.<sup>30</sup>

And, of course, the trajectory of Cromwell's becoming is necessarily paralleled by an inverse transformation: king becoming thing (to borrow the rhyme that became ubiquitous in the period).<sup>31</sup> The depiction of Charles "bow[ing] his comely head / Down, as upon a bed" (lines 63-64) captures that "memorable" instant (line 65) when the king is brutally exposed as less than even mere body, his corporeal wholeness severed by the descent of the axe's edge. Yet here, too, paradoxes abound, indicated by the peculiar reversal of active and passive. For though the king represents, on the one hand, the very epitome of patience in that his body suffers the event, the description lends him, on the other hand, a remarkable, if ambiguous, degree of activity, turning the inevitability of the action into something akin to choice: "*He* nothing common did or mean / Upon that memorable scene" (lines 57-58). The active verb "did" makes this an act, and this transformation of "helpless" king (line 62) to "royal actor" (line 53) is further emphasised by his refusal to call upon the gods, his "try[ing]" the axe's edge, and finally even by his "bow[ing]" his head. All these moments are characteristically double-edged: to act is to do but is also to play a part inscribed for you by someone else. To lay one's head down is to act, but also to submit to someone else. The almost invisible shift of "down" from an adverb associated with Charles' action to an adjective attached to an object, the "bed" upon which he lays his head, offers furthermore a particularly powerful instance of one of Marvell's defining traits, aptly described by Geoffrey Hartman as "the unapparent movement from the metaphoric to the literal."<sup>32</sup>

If Charles becomes, then, most active at the lowest point of suffrance, Cromwell conversely becomes most passive at the highest point of achievement. As commentators have often noted, Cromwell's activity oftens seems ambiguously suspended between *his* own doing and

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<sup>29</sup>As Worden suggests, a sceptic's response to Marvell's rhetorical query – "What field of all the Civil Wars / Where his were not the deepest scars" – might well be: None of them.

<sup>30</sup>Stocker reads this image of Cromwell as a force of Nature in purely providentialist terms, arguing that Cromwell's role is to prepare the world for the Second Coming. Hence, the later pronouncement in the poem that Cromwell shall "to all States not free / . . . Climacteric be" (lines 103-104) represents for her the climax of Cromwell's function as "an agent of God in *world* history, who thus 'realizes' the peculiar mission of England." See *Apocalyptic Marvell*, 100. I remain unconvinced that Marvell is quite so convinced here of the inevitability of the Second Coming, let alone of its imminent occurrence.

<sup>31</sup>Norbrook claims that the "iconoclastic rhyming of 'king' with 'thing' was to become a favourite verbal tic of republicans" (156), as for instance in George Wither's celebration of the sale of royal estates in his 1649 *Carmen Eucharisticon*: "We have seen the pride of *Kings*, / With those much desired things, / Whence their vain ambition springs, / Scorn'd despis'd, and set at nought" (cited in Norbrook, 239). But the rhyme could also serve royalist laments for the fall of the monarchy. Thus, Sir John Denham's 1656 translation of Virgil revalues the rhyme by linking King Priam's death to Charles': "On the cold earth lyes this neglected King, / A headless Carkass, and a nameless Thing" (cited in Norbrook, 310). Even without explicitly using the rhyme, Marvell's Ode skilfully evokes and balances both possibilities.

<sup>32</sup>Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Marvell, St. Paul, and the Body of Hope," *ELH* 31 (2), 188.

his agency on the *behalf* of a higher power: “But through adventurous war / Urged his active star” (lines 11-12).<sup>33</sup> While (gramatically) it is Cromwell who (actively) “urges” his star, it is nonetheless his ascendant star that is described as “active.” Similarly, the word “adventurous” evokes both the activity of venturing forth and the risky dependence on chance, on the contingent outcome of his “restlessness.”

With these temporal paradoxes in mind, it is instructive to place Marvell’s Ode alongside a near-contemporary text, Thomas Hobbes’ 1651 *Leviathan*, which develops a bifurcated relationship to time and history that may be seen, if not as identical, at least as an equivalent to Marvell’s. The comparison points to a set of shared concerns, even as it locates significant differences that bespeak their distinctive responses to those concerns. In his superb reading of *Leviathan*, J. G. A. Pocock uncovers a fundamental distinction between “philosophy and history as two modes of knowledge,”<sup>34</sup> with only the former capable of yielding certainty. Hobbes’ epistemology demands a strict separation of logical from temporal consequence. As Pocock describes it, “we can escape from the flux [of history], and enter a world of scientific certainties, if we abandon our insistence on thinking diachronically and, instead of seeking to argue from moment to moment, occurrence to occurrence, reason from premise to consequence” (156). In terms of how the Ode represents Cromwell, logical consequence corresponds to the synchronic notion of an encompassing living present in which bodies act on bodies, one state of affairs connects with another. An obvious instance in the Ode of such a universal “now” is the moment when Marvell avails himself of the language of science: “Nature that hateth emptiness, / Allows of penetration less: / And therefore must make room / Where greater spirits come” (lines 39-42). But even beyond the recourse to natural laws, Marvell expresses this dimension of temporality through poem’s use of the trappings of logical argument. The Ode repeatedly takes the form of moving from premise to consequence – evidenced, for instance, in the “So” of lines 9, 67 and 89, which derive a conclusion based on a parallel with an anterior fact. Such judgements may operate diachronically in that they connect one moment in the past to other occurrences in the present and future – and, indeed, “So” also functions as a temporal connective. But what they formally insist upon, above all, is connecting those events as premise to conclusion. To cite the famous line from Marvell’s later far and less ambiguous celebration of Cromwell, “The First Anniversary of the Government under his Highness the Lord Protector”: “[i]f these the times, then this

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<sup>33</sup>As Stocker rightly notes, “How much control Cromwell exercises over his own force, and what sort of force it is, remains substantially in question.” See *Apocalyptic Marvell*, 76.

<sup>34</sup>J. G. A. Pocock, “Time, History and Eschatology in the thought of Thomas Hobbes,” in *Politics, Language & Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 158. Subsequent citations indicated by page number in the body of the essay.

must be the man” (line 144).<sup>35</sup>

The time of history in Hobbes, by contrast, approximates what I have identified as the time of effects in Marvell’s Ode, where the now is repeatedly divided by past and future. “The present,” says Hobbes,

only has a being in nature; things past have a being in the memory only; but things to come have no being at all, the future being but a fiction of the mind, applying the sequels of actions past to the actions that are present, which with most certainty is done by him that has the most experience, but not with certainty enough. And though it be called prudence when the event answereth our expectation, yet in its own nature it is but presumption. . . .

As prudence is a presumption of the future, contracted from the experience of time past, so there is a presumption of things past, taken from other things, not future but past also. For he that hath seen by what courses and degrees a flourishing state hath first come into civil war and then to ruin, upon the sight of the ruins of any other state will guess the like war and the like courses have been there also. But this conjecture hath the same uncertainty almost with the conjecture of the future, both being grounded only upon experience.<sup>36</sup>

What Hobbes stresses here are the limits of experience, which, as he elsewhere puts it, “concludeth nothing universally.” The “now” of existence is internally divided for Hobbes via two in-existents, two unrealities: the memory of the past and the presumption of the future. Prudence in the form of internalized experience (either directly or indirectly remembered) offers us more or less *probable* knowledge but only on the condition of an essential uncertainty (“in its own nature”). We have already observed that such an uncertainty is fundamental to Marvell’s Horatian Ode. It appears in the suspension of decision that opens the poem as well as in its ambiguous attribution of activity and passivity. Even at the poem’s centre, reservations hedge the prophetic conclusions concerning the State, bespeaking an anxiety concerning possible outcomes. Despite Marvell’s citing Livy’s story as a harbinger of the “happy fate” lying in store for the State, the bleeding head (and the architects’ fright at encountering it) also point directly to a different possible future. After all, the Ode seems

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<sup>35</sup>I should emphasise that my concern here is to locate what we might call a family resemblance between Hobbesian and Marvellian time. Strictly speaking, Hobbes’ idea of logical consequence is atemporal – and precisely its independence from the flux of time guarantees the certainty of knowledge derived by means of logic. By contrast, Marvell’s “now” of bodies and states is temporal in that it evokes, as we have seen, an ongoing, extended present. Nevertheless, Marvell’s use of logic in the poem suggests a parallel between his position and Hobbes’.

<sup>36</sup>Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, i, 3. As cited in Pocock, “Hobbes,” 154-55.

to envision past, present, and future in terms of a perpetual state of war that extends from Cromwell's burning through the air, to his return from a brutal conquest of Ireland, to the promise of yet more battles to come: time has a colour, and it is red.<sup>37</sup> It is surely no coincidence that both Marvell and Hobbes underscore contingency and the impossibility of certain knowledge when they speak of the fate of a State undergoing or emerging from a civil war, an intestine battle that has rendered loyalties and predictions of loyalties – and thereby the future itself – utterly unstable. “Things to come,” as Hobbes insists, “have no being at all.”

And yet, even if the future doesn't “exist in time,” it does, Deleuze suggests, “inhere in time.”<sup>38</sup> For such instability is precisely the point. In eluding the present of existence, pure becoming – the dimension of the event – has as its correlate the radical contingency of the outcome, the radical undecidability that attends such transformation. What will come of Cromwell's unforeseen intervention is still unknown. And insofar as the poet shadows Cromwell in his spatial and temporal restlessness, moving relentlessly like the figure he describes over times and places, his own moment of decision partakes, too, of a constitutive uncertainty. Countering the hopeful reading that Livy permits, it thus remains a possibility – perhaps even a probability – that the architects' fright at the bleeding head they uncover will itself prove prophetic, that the State to come will not escape the nightmare of its inception.

The domain of the prophetic opens a further connection between Marvell and Hobbes, though ultimately one that will signal their divergence. For the Hobbesian frame opposing scientific or philosophical knowledge to the probabilistic realm of historical knowledge is itself enframed by a different, eschatological route to certainty: faith and belief in prophecy. Unlike the synchronic nature of certain knowledge, this mode of knowing is for Hobbes fundamentally diachronic, since it rests, first, upon the acts God has performed, “including acts of revelation to prophets, at various points in time”; and, second, upon the words through which we have knowledge of his acts, words that have been revealed to prophets at specific moments in time, and “are subsequently transmitted through tracts of time by the authority, religious or civil, on which the prophets and their words are taken to be authentically God's” (159-60). To cite Pocock, Hobbes' turn to the certainty of belief in authority amounts to a “radical temporalization of salvation” (186). Against the institutionalisation of salvation through the Church, Hobbes holds up faith in Christ's promise to return in the

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<sup>37</sup>No doubt, both Norbrook and Worden are right to point out that Marvell's English contemporaries did not seem particularly upset by Cromwell's butchering the Irish at Drogheda and Wexford in 1649. Nevertheless, there is more than enough evidence to indicate English revulsion at Cromwell's brutal treatment of those ostensibly on his own side in the wake of the Civil War.

<sup>38</sup>Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 5.



future: “salvation came through this expectation and not through Christ’s real presence in the immediate now of the sacramental union; but it followed both that salvation could only come about in time and that Christ himself was seen as operating diachronically” (178). In this sense, Hobbes draws the process of salvation into the historical time of effects. He reinscribes certainty in the uncertain domain of human experience in terms of the eschatological belief in God’s word: by saying that he will come again, God commits himself to his coming again. And it is this saying, that is, the commitment of divine power through the word, that has been diachronically preserved and in which we therefore believe with absolute certainty. Marvell’s own parallel investment in drawing eschatology into the embrace of historical time has been amply indicated by a number of critics (and most exhaustively by Margarita Stocker). Indeed, as we have seen, in addition to the explicit prophecy generated by Charles’ execution, the Horatian Ode engages this “temporalization of salvation” through its apparent identification of Cromwell with the *eschaton*, heralding the Second Coming.

Nevertheless, it is precisely here that Marvell parts company with Hobbes. In the final analysis, Hobbes is willing to cede the determination of the promised future to the sovereign, (even though such a future implies a different mode of knowledge from the rational contract whereby the sovereign attained his own authority). As Pocock puts it, with the emergence of a Christian society, “the task of deciding what words were to be believed, what writings regarded as canonical and what authors and doctors considered authentic, now ceased to be performed by unincorporated opinion and fell instead to the civil sovereign; faith itself, always a decision, became a public act, only to be performed by one whose authority rested on neither opinion nor faith” (190). By contrast, the Ode refuses to confer on Cromwell (yet) the power of sovereign decision, but rather holds onto him as the merely possible or potential sign of an eschatological promise. This may seem close to a Hobbesian eschatology for which “[t]he present is . . . a time of remembering past prophecies and expecting the future they will foretell” (169). But there remains a crucial difference between Hobbes and Marvell regarding the very nature of expectation, of what is entailed by human faith in the promise of a kingdom to come.

There is hope, of course, no end of hope – but (perhaps) not for us. As Hartmann suggests, hope “has in it a tragic or ironic flaw by which it defeats its own expectation by anticipation.”<sup>39</sup> While the Ode doubtless evokes the *eschaton*, it does so only as a formal structure whose “contents” our time-bound judgements cannot decipher. We can never know until it has actually happened whether what is happening is in fact the fulfilment of what

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<sup>39</sup>Hartmann, “Body of Hope,” 183. This complex paradox inhering in the very notion of hope that Stocker and others often fail to see.

was promised us. Consequently, the Ode recalls a promise about whose historical realisation we can never claim definitive knowledge.<sup>40</sup> In his becoming, the poem's Cromwell points to, marks the space of, that promise, but he cannot *be* its instantiation – and neither, for that matter, can the dead King be taken unequivocally as signalling its non-fulfilment.

Marvell's attitude here does not necessarily imply either a proto-republican ethos or a royalist nostalgia – though it can arguably be read (by us) in either form. That may well be the decision we face, but it is not necessarily the decision the poem offers us. Can one not then speak instead of a complex conjunction of despair and hope, a coincidentia oppositorum whose primary symptom is undecidability? For thus it is that the Ode's thoroughly multivalent portrait of the king's dying grace hovers between a horror at the “armed bands” that “did clap their bloody hands” (lines 55-56), and the (desired) anticipation of a State that nonetheless sees its “happy fate” foreseen in the bleeding head of the dead king.

The undecidability at the very heart of decision-making contributes to the image of Marvell as the detached poet whose interest is primarily analytic. But, as my reading has suggested, the poem's untimeliness opens up a different possibility: that Marvell's putative detachment may itself be the only mode in which he can express his fundamental entanglement in an untimely historical moment. In a luminous reading of “The Garden” and the Mower poems, Hartmann persuasively argues that

hope may deny too quickly this world for the world beyond, and despair, in Marvell, is really a greater form of hope... He evokes... less a ladder or a progress than a precarious dialectic which sets ultimate hope catastrophically against hope in nature.<sup>41</sup>

This may ultimately prove too strong an assertion for the Horatian Ode, but it behooves us nonetheless to recognise that the “forced” (line 66) representation of Cromwell's force, the pragmatic acknowledgement of the necessity of the arts of power, rests upon a temporal caesura that is especially resonant at this historical juncture. Of the critics who have written on this poem, Worden sees the intricate balance of Marvell's “now” most clearly: “A world has been lost: the world will go on... Poised between past and future, framing a historic present, the Horatian Ode records . . . the fundamental shift in English civilization that, when

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<sup>40</sup>As Pocock puts it, for Hobbes “[i]t is the time-bound nature of human intelligence which renders it incapable of predicting occurrences and events with any certainty” (156) – a sentiment also echoed by Marvell in the lines that precede his judgement that Cromwell is the man for these times: “But a thick cloud about that morning lies / And intercepts the beams of mortal eyes, / That 'tis the most which we determine can/ If these the times, then this must be the man” (“First Anniversary,” lines 141-44). While faith in the eschatological offers Hobbes a route out of this dilemma, Marvell's Horatian Ode cannot follow him on that path.

<sup>41</sup>Hartmann, “Body of Hope,” 191.

every reservation has been made, the middle of the seventeenth century brought about.”<sup>42</sup> Marvell gives shape to a cleft between temporalities – between a time of bodies and a time of effects – out of which a future will emerge: tantalising in its possibility, seductive in its promise, but charged with the “tragic or ironic” flaw that can, in a moment, reverse hope into despair. The Horatian Ode waits upon what will show itself. What will show itself may well turn out to be a monster. Only time will tell.

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<sup>42</sup>Worden, “Marvell, Cromwell, and the Horatian Ode,” 178.