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Review by George Klawitter

Smith, Nigel, ed. *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*. Longman Annotated English Poets Series. London: Francis and Taylor; New York: Longman: 2003. 468 pages.

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We have in Nigel Smith's new edition of Marvell's poems a volume that is scholarly and up to date, taking into consideration all of the significant work done on Marvell's poems in the last hundred years. All of Marvell's poems are included in the present edition, including the eighteen poems in Latin and the one poem in Greek. In addition, one poem of dubious attribution is included in an appendix, and twenty-one poems of really dubious attribution are listed by title only in another appendix. Smith has been tireless in his research to solidify the canon. Each poem is prefaced by extensive remarks on dating, publication, context, sources, and critical reception. Apparatus, however, is judicious. "Coy Mistress," for example, begins with a four page, double column, introduction. The poem (with annotations) takes another four pages. Eight pages is certainly not overkill on so important a Renaissance poem. Critical references are clear and easily traced in the six-page bibliography that closes the book. Textual variants are thankfully saved for the back of the book where they are accessible to textual scholars and will not distract undergraduate researchers.

The Smith edition is attractive and uses as frontispiece the standard Marvell portrait from the London National Portrait Gallery. Other illustrations include the 1681 title page of the *Miscellaneous Poems*, other title pages of various works important to individual poems, two charming engravings of Appleton House, and a hand drawn survey of Bolton Percy which includes the Nun Appleton estate c. 1596.

Since the only semi-authoritative text for Marvell's poetry is the 1681 edition, which appeared three years after his death and was published by whom Marvellians generally accept as his legitimate wife, the work for an edition should be clear cut. But it is not because the 1681 edition is messy and includes pieces that are not Marvell's. Of the doubtful lyrics in the 1681 edition, Smith

accepts only “Tom May’s Death” as unquestionably Marvell’s. Moreover, the absence of manuscripts in anyone’s hand dating to Marvell’s lifetime presents other problems: there are only ten such contemporary artifacts for evidence of Marvell’s received readership. Smith concludes that Marvell’s poems did not enjoy wide circulation in manuscript, although Marvell’s wife insisted that he did keep the poems as a “collection” among his papers. Smith is thus forced to accept the order of poems in the 1681 edition as a kind of chronology in place of valid compositional dates for many of the lyrics. He does speculate, however, with convincing arguments for many approximate datings, e.g., for “The Unfortunate Lover” and “Clorinda and Damon,” based on style and prevailing taste. In his editorial decisions Smith makes judicious use of a problematic annotated 1681 copy which may have belonged to Marvell’s nephew, but Smith is not a slave to it as Donno may have been for her 1972 edition.

Marvellians will find the Smith edition a joy. The poems are divided into four sections beginning with five poems in print before 1650. Then fifty-four poems of the 1681 volume take up the lion’s share of the book. The “Advice-to-a-Painter” poems comprise a section all their own. Verse satires from the 1870’s conclude the canon.

A labor of fifteen years, Smith’s edition is going to remain for some time the definitive Marvell text. It is not a variorum edition by any means as Smith does not include all criticism from day one. Rather he has winnowed the important commentary from all important sources. Where interpretation has become standard, he does not bother to include critical reference. Thus, the book is not cluttered as variora tend to become in their desire to give every critic and wannabe critic a day in the sun. Smith has done what any good editor does: he selects what is essential, attributes only where necessary, and limits critical debate to matters of importance. We can ask no more from an editor. The sticker price is worth every penny. No academic library should be without the book, and no sincere Marvellian should be without a copy on the office shelf.

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