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Review by Joan Faust

Sambras, Gilles, ed. *New Perspectives on Andrew Marvell*. Reims: PU de Reims, 2008. 194 pages.

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Perhaps another text purporting to offer “new perspectives” on Andrew Marvell might be judged superfluous at best. After all, a quick search on the MLA Bibliography reveals fourteen articles offering a “new” look at the enigmatic seventeenth-century poet, from Kitty Scoular Datta’s 1969 “New Light on Marvell’s ‘A Dialogue between the Soul and Body’” to Jules Brody’s 1989 “The Resurrection of the Body: A New Reading of Marvell’s ‘To His Coy Mistress.’” Likewise, the term “perspective” often finds its way into studies of Marvell, offering a unique angle or exploring the anamorphic and visual arts aspects of Marvell’s works, the slippery term mirroring the slippery poet, as in Clayton Thomas’s 1977 “It is Marvell He Outdwells His Hour’: Some Perspectives on Marvell’s Medium” and Milona Romero Allué’s 1999 “Perspectives of the Eye and Perspectives of the Mind: Marvell’s ‘Nymph Complaining For the Death of Her Fawn.’”

Nonetheless, Gilles Sambras brings together eleven quite new perspectives on the enigmatic writer, indicating, as Sambras describes, the “vivacity and scope of Marvellian study” (7), whether interest lies in the crucial years of English history explored by Marvell’s political poems and prose or in the timeless views of life, death, eternity, and love presented in the lyric poems.

The product of papers presented during the International Andrew Marvell Conference held in Rheims May 13-14, 2005, the collection organizes essays into three main groups: four dealing with contextual and intertextual relationships between Marvell’s works and their socio-cultural environment, four offering new insights on Marvell’s more public and political works, two suggesting new readings of particular poems, and a concluding review of Marvell’s editorial and critical history by Nigel Smith, who also describes his own editorial decisions in compiling his 2003 edition of Marvell’s poetry and offers five areas of new trends in Marvell criticism.

The four first essays indeed exemplify the multiple meanings of perspective and of Marvell's works themselves. Klaudia Laczynska convincingly argues in her tour of the kaleidoscopic images of "Upon Appleton House" that these often anamorphic images mirror New Philosophy disorientation, making Nun Appleton an only partly idealized microcosm of the world's lost perfection. Similarly, Gabriella Guder-Poni stresses visually "self-interwoven" images in both "Appleton House" and "The Garden" but notes that while the figure of Cupid plays a major role in the Latin companion piece "Hortus," Marvell collapses the character into both pursuer and pursued in the English poems, borrowing images from Ausonius to boot. Estelle Haan focuses on Marvell's Latin/English companion pieces, turning the perspective glass to Renaissance pedagogy and possible theoretical advantages of Marvell's bilingualism. In her comparison of the intersections between the poet's clever mirroring and wordplay of Latin and English, she wittily argues we should see Marvell as "ambilingual rather than bilingual," taking from the classical but creating in his English versions something entirely new. Jon Stainsby sees James Harrington's *The Commonwealth of Oceana* and Marvell's writings of the 1650s as sharing a Machiavellian perspective, giving us a fresh view of both writers.

The next five essays focus upon that which cannot be focused: Marvell's ambiguity. Art Kavanagh, Warren Chernaik, Charles-Edouard Levillain, and Martin Dzelzainis move to political and international realms, exploring new ways to see the standard view of Marvell as indefinable, from the "unresolved ambivalence" in "Upon the Death of Lord Hastings" (90) to the skirting of censorship restrictions in Marvell's satirical writings (Chernaik) to Marvell's purposely unidentifiable anti-French attitudes in his Restoration writings (Levillain) to his noticeable absence in the controversial and clandestine world of Restoration underground printers. Chernaik especially offers intriguing evidence of Marvell's subtle attacks on Charles II by contrasting his private correspondence with his published satires and the public reaction they provoked.

George Klawitter certainly offers a new perspective on Marvell's "The Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn." Acknowledging the "amorphous meaning of the nymph," Klawitter seeks a "more satisfying interpretation" of the poem by focusing on

its sexual imagery, “specifically reading the fawn as clitoris” (146). Editor Gillas Sambras argues against the common view that Marvell’s ambiguity is an intentionally crafted screen to hide deeply-felt personal attitudes. Instead, he sees the poetry as “inconsistent” or “contradictory,” dyphonic discourse that does not explain but helps to understand (161-2). Using illustrative examples from the visual arts, Sambras explores the debate not only between pagan and Christian-Puritan but between Puritan and Catholic in the pastoral poems.

Most recent editor of Marvell’s works Nigel Smith appropriately concludes the collection with a definitive survey of new directions in textual, biographical, poetical, ethical, sexual, and imagistic studies of Marvell. Beginning with T. S. Eliot’s 1921 essay in the *TLS* that confirmed Marvell as a serious poet, tracing the increasingly accurate biographies and editions of his works, and concluding with five areas “in which Marvell now appears in new critical light” (185), Smith confirms that the contributors to *New Perspectives on Andrew Marvell* are indeed moving in the right directions. Readers who wish to advance and enrich their knowledge and appreciation of the poet should take notice.

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