

argument is lessened. It is not that the qualification as propaganda is wrong or unfounded, but rather that it brings to the material a framework that is inadequate. It serves to close down the discussion in contrast to what Welch does so beautifully: to open it up, in new and important ways.

George Klawitter. *Marvell, Sexual-Orientation, and Seventeenth-Century Poetry*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 2017. ix + 269 pp. \$98.77. Review by BRENDAN PRAWDZIK, THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY.

When first taking an interest in Andrew Marvell, I was grateful to read George Klawitter's essay, "Andrew Marvell and the Nymph's Little Foot." Here, Klawitter demonstrated, provocatively, an anatomically precise, autoerotic sexuality in Marvell's lyric, "The Nymph Complaining on the Death of Her Fawn." Published in a collection of *New Perspectives on Andrew Marvell* (Reims: 2008), the essay was well situated. It focused a unique vision upon poetry and produced insight from its niche.

The scholarly monograph does not suit Klawitter. *Andrew Marvell, Sexual Orientation, and Seventeenth-Century Poetry* is a patchwork of meandering prose that, despite repeated stabs at the mysteries of Marvell's verse, remains unthreaded and wasteful. It offers no serious contribution to Marvell studies, in part because it pretends to be an alternative to scholarship that it portrays as pretentious and hypermasculine. Most of Klawitter's use of the existing literature on Marvell, seventeenth-century poetry, and theory of sexuality, gender, and identity is superficial and convenient. It does not demonstrate the intellectual gratitude that comes with digesting knowledge gathered, concocted, and presented in rigorous scholarship.

The book's broadest claims are correct. Marvell's poetry is richly and strangely erotic. The poems show, variously, an ugly heterosexuality, moments of attractive homoeroticism or queerness, scenes of autoeroticism, and suggestions of asexuality. The book's most welcome contribution is its placement of celibacy and asexuality within the spectrum of sexual identity.

At \$98.77 from an academic press, the book would seem to be written for scholars. On occasions, Klawitter distances himself from the scholarship, casting dubious generalizations without grounding them in responsible research. Several times, he refers to “macho man scholars” who are, apparently, too entrenched in heteronormativity to appreciate his approach. Who are these people? I am surprised to read that literary scholars have been reluctant to consider queer interpretations. Certainly, they have long abandoned any belief that Marvell was sexually normative. Rather, it has long been sensitive to the erotic fluidity of his verse.

Elsewhere, Klawitter suggests that his book might open means to sexual self-understanding. For instance, seventeenth-century poems with gender-neutral pronouns “can surely serve as essential a purpose for today’s gays and lesbians as any heterosexually flavored poems serve for heterosexuals.” The “Unfortunate Lover,” perhaps Marvell’s obscurest lyric, “can bring great homoerotic satisfaction to gay readers” (7). Yet the book cannot serve these purposes: “today’s gays and lesbians” will not be seeking self-understanding in publications from academic presses about seventeenth-century poetry. Thankfully, today’s LGBTQIA readers have, in their cultural landscapes, readily accessible, more reliable avenues toward sexual self-understanding.

Due to its investment in authorial fallacy, the book remains conceptually loose from its core. Klawitter writes, “It is time that we sound a death knell for the ‘authorial fallacy’ and let the flavor of a poem be attributed to the poet.” In “The Picture of Little T. C. in a Prospect of Flowers,” “there is no way to divorce ... Marvell from the emotional vigor of his narrator.... They are one and the same. So anything I say about the narrator’s emotional state of mind I can safely attach to Marvell’s” (149). But Klawitter generates dubious, un-researched context to support his interpretations. Thus, in the book’s absurd reading of “The Garden” as an attack on the Diggers, the “true message ... is, of course, only apparent to readers who can read in the poem Marvell’s disdain for the radical Levellers” (157)—no doubt, an audience of one. It is this practice—of attempting to discover the biographical truth of the poet in his verse while using frail assumptions about biography and context to ground interpretation—that regularly insulates Klawitter within his own fancy.

Klawitter fails to engage with major works that are most relevant to his project. Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker's *Andrew Marvell: Orphan of the Hurricane* (2011) is overlooked entirely. Their subject is Marvell's "written life" as revealed in his poetics; this "written life" includes sexual trauma, sexual ambiguity, and fantasies of sexual play. More importantly, Hirst and Zwicker appreciate the sophistication of Marvell's irony, the tangling vines of which Klawitter remains bound while laying claim to the poet's soul and "authentic" self (39). Also overlooked is Nigel Smith's *Andrew Marvell: The Chameleon* (2010), the most recent and important biography of the poet.

Certainly, the book lags far behind recent theory and scholarship focusing on gender and sexuality. Any serious engagement with queer theory would have helped Klawitter to avoid some of the book's outdated commentary.

Klawitter is best when reading the poetry closely. His unique eye throws numerous illuminating sparks. Yet the analyses often lead to cheap implications: "I doubt if Marvell ever kissed a woman. If he had, the kiss or the yearning for it would have settled somewhere into his verses" (46). Although there is "no overt reference to sodomy" in the poems, "we should not conclude that there is no nonsodomitical homoerotic underbelly in some of his verses" (99). (I leave the writing to speak for itself.)

Too often, we are expected to accept wild claims and speculation:

- "Young Love" focuses on "a fifteen-year-old . . . who very well may be Marvell's poetic dalliance [sic] with King Charles [I]" (75).
- "The Unfortunate Lover" owes to "an actual shipwreck and the actual loss of a person special to the poet or to a poetic coterie" (101).
- "Marvell may very well have lived a double life in war-torn England, posing as celibate tutor to Maria Fairfax in the same year that he lusted after Damon, the mower of her father's fields" (104).
- "We have little to no history of eighteenth-century lower-class banter—it may very well, however, have included generous references to clitoral excitement" (146).
- "[R]eading Andrew Marvell's poetry closely, we could very well conclude that the man was celibate, given the dearth of serious love poems and given his attitude on women exemplified by Chloe

- and Clara" (201).
- The Nymph's "fawn" represents her "clitoris" (138), and the fawn's shooting by "wanton troopers" is "a kind of poetic gang rape" (141).
 - Marvell attacked the Diggers (and Levellers—Klawitter does not seem to realize the disinctio) in "The Garden" "because Marvell was young and brash and did not know any better" (160).

When Klawitter writes that he "sets" Marvell's lyrics "in a context of other Renaissance poems," he is referring to an organizational maneuver intended, it would seem, to give the book breadth and relevance. The chapters typically proceed from introductory mediations on Marvellian sexuality, to accusations against the scholarship in general, and to close reading of the poetry for evidence of sexual "orientations." (It should be noted that the problematic term "sexual orientation," part of the book's title, is left undefined.) In each of these chapters, two additional authors are then surveyed and brought heavy-handedly back to Marvell. Because these authors must answer to Klawitter's focus on "orientation" (?), they offer little to our understanding of "seventeenth-century poetry," the title's final term.

One of the book's priorities is to incorporate the essays that Klawitter has published about Marvell and other poets. The problem is that they seem incorporated more because they exist than because they enrich a cohesive project. It devotes nine pages to Richard Barnfield, who did not write in the seventeenth century. It devotes six to Erasmus, another sixteenth-century author.

The most bizarre inclusion involves the attempt to read "The Garden" as a parody of Digger (and Leveller?) ideals. Remote from the book's focus, these pages run counter to purpose.

One cannot help but think that Klawitter was disserved by his editors. Should this book have been accepted for publication? Should it have passed a post-contract review? Why was the author not guided or pushed to develop key terms, scholarly engagements, and theoretical, historical, and biographical assumptions? Why were so many of Klawitter's published essays imported, rather than integrated, into this project? In its published form, *Andrew Marvell, Sexual Orientation, and Seventeenth-Century Poetry* shows some potential for a book that may have been.