

# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



## Manifesting the Soul in Andrew Marvell's 'On a Drop of Dew'

Ben Faber

Redeemer University College

[bfaber@redeemer.ca](mailto:bfaber@redeemer.ca)

### 1. Paradoxical Marvell

'The ideal simplicity, approached by resolving contradictions' is the epigraph to the chapter on Andrew Marvell's 'The Garden' in William Empson's *Some Versions of Pastoral*.<sup>1</sup> With Marvell, however, the phrase 'ideal simplicity' itself requires resolving: Marvell is anything but simple, and his versions of pastoral consistently complicate the relationship between the ideal and the real. The material world in 'The Garden', for instance, may be annihilated in an ideal 'green thought in a green shade' (48) but even that happy, pure, and sweet place in the mind is 'beyond a mortal's share' (57, 61).<sup>2</sup> A painfully English experience of the fall—the 'luckless apple' of the Civil Wars—turns the Edenic environment of Nun Appleton into militias, forts, and garrisons, with Switzers, artillery, engines, and pillaging ('Upon Appleton House', 327). Ecocritical studies by Diane Kelsey McColley, Robert Watson, Andrew McRae, and Takashi Yoshinaka all echo the critical consensus of Marvell as a poet of ambivalence, of contradictions that remain largely unresolvable.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> All references to Marvell's poems are taken from *The Poems of Andrew Marvell* ed. by Nigel Smith (New York: Longman, 2003) and are cited parenthetically.

<sup>3</sup> Diane Kelsey McColley, *Poetry and Ecology in the Age of Milton and Marvell* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Robert Watson, *Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance* (Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania, 2007); Andrew McRae, 'The green Marvell' in *The Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell*, ed. by Derek Hirst and Stephen N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 122-139; Takashi Yoshinaka, *Marvell's Ambivalence: Religion and the Politics of Imagination in Mid-Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011).

The ideal simplicity is also elusive when reading Marvell's political poetry and prose: Nigel Smith's biography of Marvell is subtitled 'The Chameleon' for good reason.<sup>4</sup> Despite substantial amounts of documentary evidence, archival material, and correspondence, not to mention frequent self-reflexive passages in the prose works and deep introspection in the lyrical poetry, one comes away with remarkably little to say with confidence about the 'real' Andrew Marvell. Marvell's day-to-day activities as Member of Parliament may be recorded in his letters to his constituents in Hull and his reliable service on various committees noted in Parliament's records but what makes Marvell tick as a political animal remains elusive. Marvell's known political associates represent an interesting spectrum of positions, and Marvell the republican was not averse to working with individuals of the royal court when the rightness of the cause required such collaboration.<sup>5</sup> Is the real Andrew Marvell the pragmatist, opportunist, double-dealer, and 'trimmer', or the principled champion of liberty, the conscientious follower of truth, the loyal citizen of the republic of freedom, and faithful friend of John Milton?

The dilemma that this essay seeks to resolve is the philosophical corollary of the political one as it relates to Marvell's use of nature to portray the relationship between the body and the soul in 'On a Drop of Dew'. In 'A Dialogue, Between the Resolved Soul, and Created Pleasure', Marvell appears to embrace a classical dualism of soul and body, immortal and mortal, being and becoming, sacred and secular, spiritual and carnal. The created pleasures that tempt the resolved soul in the first half of 'A Dialogue, Between the Resolved Soul, and Created Pleasure', however, are not the debased sensualities of a Comus-like vision but are fruits, flowers, roses and perfumes; only in the second half of the poem, after the temptation of natural beauties seem to have failed, does pleasure resort to the artificial pleasures such as 'minted gold' (58). An earlier poem, 'Upon the Death of Lord Hastings', also appears to espouse a Platonic perspective on the impermanence of earthly life and the immutable status of the soul in heaven. But the sympathetic inclusion of Mayerne, the king's physician, chemist, and natural philosopher, in the latter portion of the poem complicates the easy dualism of the material and immaterial, the body and the soul. Even though the elegy uses Mayerne as the trope of the hopelessness of even the most expert medical intervention ('All he had tried, but all in vain', 57), Marvell has also subtly reminded the reader of alchemy's premise that matter can be transmuted into spirit—a metaphor for the glorification of the body at the resurrection. As this essay will show, alchemical imagery in the final lines of 'On a Drop of Dew' will be crucial to Marvell's understanding of the interdependent relationship of the soul to the body.

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<sup>4</sup> Nigel Smith, *Andrew Marvell: The Chameleon* (New Haven: Yale, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Smith, *Andrew Marvell*, pp. 215 and 218.

Even with the relatively typical suspicion of the body in ‘A Dialogue between the Soul and Body’, Marvell yet remains an unlikely candidate for the typical mid-century Platonist or Neo-Platonist. Robert Watson, Nigel Smith, Juliet Cummins, and others have noted Marvell’s tendency toward nominalism; this inclination toward nominalism (which never quite develops into full-blown Nominalism) would conflict with a Platonic framework of idealism, a framework in which Marvell would also have to place the relationship between body and soul.<sup>6</sup> Watson argues that Marvell’s ‘The Garden’ expresses a nominalism through the non-disclosive naming that the poem enacts: it names things in the garden without such naming ever transcending the materiality of the thing signified. Watson posits that Adam in the garden blithely distributes names to things, but without knowledge of the universals that the act of naming is meant to signify; such transcendent knowledge is beyond Adam’s earth-bound comprehension, and the project of language-as-naming is ultimately an illusion.<sup>7</sup> Smith has also noted the latent nominalism in Marvell’s theology, particularly in the poem ‘The Loyal Scot’. After noting the mixture of contradictions of Stoicism, Epicurianism and neo-Platonism in Marvell’s work, Smith concludes in as positive a manner possible:

All of this illustrates the observation with which this essay began: Marvell capitalizes on the energies of contrary forces as both a theme and an embodiment, at every level of poetic construction. They are usually figured as one kind of doubleness or another: a reversal, an instance of reflexivity, or a ‘self-inwoven device’.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, whether it is the paradox of ideal realism in the green poetry, his inter-partisanship of the political engagement, or his reversals in philosophical outlook, Marvell’s imagination seems to dwell in the dynamic tension between contrarities, without which there is no progression.

This essay offers a close reading of Marvell’s ‘On a Drop of Dew’ to investigate how this very deliberately contrived poem expresses in its theme and embodiment Marvell’s theory of the soul’s organic connection with the body. ‘On a Drop of Dew’, written in the late 1640s and published posthumously in 1681, is particularly apt for an exploration of Marvellian complexity because it focuses his ecological sensibility, metaphysical

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<sup>6</sup> Juliet Cummins, ‘The Enclosed Garden and the Apocalypse: immanent versus transcendent time in Milton and Marvell’ in *Milton and the Ends of Times: Essays on the Apocalypse and the Millennium*, ed. by Juliet Cummins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 192-200.

<sup>7</sup> Watson, *Back to Nature*, pp. 108-18.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, ‘The Boomerang Theology of Andrew Marvell’, *Renaissance and Reformation* 25.4 (2001), 139-55 (p. 143).

aesthetic, and philosophical orientation precisely on the crux of the soul's connection with the body. This essay will examine first the dynamism of the simile that determines the structure of the poem; then the poem's transition from a verbal comparison in the figure of the simile to a visual correspondence in the figure of the emblem; and finally to the unification of theme and embodiment in the poem's concluding image. The figure of simile and the structure of emblem in the poem both express and embody Marvell's synergistic notion of the material and the spiritual, the body and the soul. Typical of the deliberately self-reflexive metaphysical poetry for which he is known, Marvell conveys his view of the body and soul as an interdependent unity in a poem that consists of interdependent figures.

## 2. Simile as Theme and Embodiment

The poem begins with an invitation to consider an extended comparison. Similar to the construction that Shakespeare uses in *Venus and Adonis*, 'Look when a painter would surpass the life ... / So did this horse excel a common one' (289-294), the phrase 'See how' is an illocutionary speech act that constitutes a relationship of comparison between two objects:<sup>9</sup>

See how the orient dew,  
Shed from the bosom of the morn  
Into the blowing roses,  
Yet careless of its mansion new (1-4)

The comparison signaled in the opening line is restarted by an echo of the invitation at line 9: '[See how] it the purple flower does slight, / Scarce touching where it lies, *etc.*' The reader reaches the promised second half of the comparison only at line 19:

So the soul, that drop, that ray  
Of the clear fountain of eternal day,  
Could it within the human flower be seen, *etc.* (19-21)

Structurally, by the *rhetorical* figure of the extended *simile*, the poem signals that *analogy* is the *logical* process the reader is invited to enact in the poem: simile is the verbal expression in a concrete image of the analogical process of comparing two things

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<sup>9</sup> William Shakespeare, *Venus and Adonis* in *Poems*, ed. by John Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 95.

conceptually. The structural principle of the poem is therefore analogous to the figure of the simile; the poem does not simply *use* similes, its formal shape *is* that of a simile, in the sense made famous by Christopher Ricks's phrase 'self-inwoven simile'.<sup>10</sup> A simile is the rhetorical means to consider the logical relationship between the natural and the supernatural, matter and spirit, body and soul. In 'On a Drop of Dew', the invocation of a simile as the structural principle of the poem also reflects the synergy of apparently unrelated objects that are joined in one rhetorical device. This is just the sort of metaphysical wit that Samuel Johnson complained of in his life of Cowley: 'a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. ...The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions'.<sup>11</sup>

In this instance, however, Marvell cannot be accused of perversely ransacking nature for the picture of the dewdrop ensconced in a flower. Gervase Markham, in *The Second Book of the English Husbandman* (1614), described the heliotropic flower known as the Crown Imperial as consisting of just such a phenomenon:

In the midst of the flower you shall see a Pearle stand, in proportion, colour, and orientnesse, like a true natural Pearle, onely it is of a soft liquid substance: This Pearle if you shake the flower neuer so violently will not fall off, neither if you let it continue neuer so long, will it either encrease or diminish in the bignesse, but remayneth all one: yet if with your finger you take and wipe it away, in lesse then an houre after you shall haue another arise in the same place, and of the same bignesse. This Pearle if you taste it vpon your tongue, is pleasant and sweet like honey: this flower when the Sunne ariseth, you shall see it looke directly to the East, with the stalke bent lowe there-vnto, and as the Sunne ariseth higher and higher, so the flower will likewise ascend, and when the Sunne is come into the *Meridian* or noone poynt, which is directly ouer it, then will it stand vpright vpon the stalke, and looke directly vpward, and as the Sunne declineth, so will it likewise decline, and at the Sunne setting looke directly to the West onely.<sup>12</sup>

The quality of the pearl-like drop in the Crown Imperial (*Fritillaria Imperialis*) includes the possibility that it is wondrously self-generated, that it is associated with the eastern hemisphere, and that it maintains an unbroken connection with the sun. In Markham's

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<sup>10</sup> Christopher Ricks, *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Johnson, 'Cowley' in *Samuel Johnson*, ed. by Donald Greene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 678.

<sup>12</sup> Gervase Markham, *The Second Booke of the English Husbandman* (London: John Browne, 1614), p. 38.

account, the drop is personified: it stands, looks, ascends, and declines in the circadian rhythm of the sun's rising and setting, the movement from east to west that is also symbolic of birth and death, as in John Donne's 'Good Friday, 1613, Riding Westward' and 'Hymn to God, my God, in My Sickness'. In the latter half of 'On a Drop of Dew' (19-37), Marvell will use language similar to Markham's to describe the soul's connection with heaven. Marvell's comparison, Samuel Johnson's aversion to metaphysical conceit notwithstanding, is an image from English husbandry that is put to aesthetic use.<sup>13</sup>

While the structure of the comparison between the drop of dew and the soul that shapes the form of the poem is the simile, in both halves of poem the operative rhetorical figure is that of the *metaphor*. The Orient Dew is 'Shed', from the 'bosom of the morn', yet 'careless of its mansion new', and 'in its little globe's extent, / Frames as it can its native element' (2, 4, 7-8). There is only one local simile in a poem that is structured globally as a simile and it comes in line 13. The dewdrop,

gazing back upon the skies,  
Shines with a mournful light;  
*Like* its own tear,  
Because so long divided from the sphere. (11-14)

Upon closer examination, this simile turns out to be self-reflexive, with the dewdrop serving as both terms of the comparison. The reader is not asked to imagine two objects, namely, the dewdrop and the tear: in this instance, the dewdrop *is* its own tear. The sole simile in the poem, then, subverts itself as simile by being a paradox of non-separation of the two terms in the comparison, not unlike the central conceit of Marvell's 'Eyes and Tears'. Metaphor offers a more fluid form of comparison than simile, and Marvell's use of metaphors in the first half of the poem's extended simile demands the interactive involvement of the reader in the text. In a sense, the central simile in 'On a Drop of Dew'

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<sup>13</sup> See also 'Of the Crown Imperial' in John Gerard, *The Herball* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; London: Adam Islip, Joice Norton, and Richard Whitakers, 1633): 'In the bottome of each of these bells there is placed six drops of most cleere shining sweet water, in tast like sugar, resembling in shew faire Orient pearles; the which drops if you take away, there do immediately appeare the like: notwithstanding if they may be suffered to stand still in the floure according to his owne nature, they wil neuer fall away, no not if you strike the plant vntill it be broken' (202). Marvell's dewdrop is in a rose rather than the Imperial Lilly, a feature highlighted by the important pun on 'rose' in the title and opening lines of the Latin companion poem, 'Ros'. Some ambiguity must remain, however, with the reference to 'the purple flower' (9) in 'On a Drop of Dew': is this a violet, a rose, or a royal flower, perhaps not unrelated to the Crown Imperial lilly?

functions as a metaphor, where the two terms (the vehicle and the tenor) coalesce into one.

Marvell deliberately gives the two parts of the simile equal attention—lines 1-18 develop the vehicle and lines 19-36 describe the tenor, composing a perfect whole:

So the soul, that drop, that ray  
Of the clear fountain of eternal day,  
Could it within the human flower be seen,  
    Rememb'ring still its former height,  
    Shuns the swart leaves and blossoms green;  
    And, recollecting its own light,  
Does, in its pure and circling thoughts, express  
The greater Heaven in an heaven less. (19-26)

Line 19 metaphorically joins the two sections of the poem: the two images that are in apposition to 'the soul' ('that drop, that ray') join the image of the tear and the pitying sun that exhales the dew-drop back to heaven again in the lines immediately preceding the turn in the simile. The purple flower in which the dew-drop is nestled (9) corresponds to the human body, with its 'swart leaves and blossoms green' (23); the dew-drop's self-enclosure (6) and concern for its purity (16) are echoed in the soul's 'pure and circling thoughts'; and the phrase 'little globe's extent' (7), the little sphere absent from its greater sphere (14), suggests 'the greater heaven in a heaven less' (26), both suggesting the image of microcosm—highly appropriate in a poem that treats the boundless soul within the closed circle (as Smith also notes) of its own poetic form. The soul, like the drop of dew and 'On a Drop of Dew' itself, may be spherical—'circling thoughts', 'Every way it turns away', 'excluding round', 'Moving but on a point below'—but it consists of two hemispheres, separated just as two terms of a simile are metaphorically contiguous (25, 28, 29, 35). The soul excludes the world, but it is 'receiving in the day'; is 'Dark beneath, but bright above'; 'Here disdainful, there in love' (30, 31, 32).

The self-enclosure of the dewdrop and the soul is aptly disclosed in the closed nature of the poem's own form. Indeed, 'On a Drop of Dew' is so concerned with figures that it is itself a figure, not in the sense that George Herbert's 'Altar' or 'Easter Wings' are figures, but in the sense that the structure of the poem suggests the structure of the reality it expresses. The binary structure of the poem as simile seems to suggest this, along with the reciprocities that are implied between the two parts and that are contained within each part. The poem falls neatly into two halves of eighteen lines each, followed by a coda of four lines: lines 1-18 lines focus on the dewdrop; lines 19-36 focus on the soul; and lines

37-40 unify the two halves. Like the dewdrop of the first half, the poem 'Round in itself incloses: / And in its little globe's extent, / Frames as it can its native element'. The structure of poem itself embodies its theme. Like the dewy soul that it describes, the poem

Does, in its pure and circling thoughts, express  
The greater Heaven in a heaven less.  
In how coy a figure wound,  
Every way it turns away. (25-28)

Christopher Tilmouth has found a similar motif of self-enclosure in John Milton's early work, with a similar fear of contamination and a desire for purity as in Marvell.<sup>14</sup> This self-enclosure has a predominantly aesthetic quality in 'On a Drop of Dew', even as the habit of self-occlusion seems also to have a psychological significance in Marvell's lyric poems.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Emblem as Theme and Embodiment

The reciprocity between the dewdrop and the soul, figured in the extended simile, is between what can be seen (the dewdrop) and what cannot be seen ('Could it within the human flower be seen', 21). This is precisely the emblematic sensibility that animated the metaphysical poets generally: the habit of picturing forth a world of correspondences through the figure of the metaphor. More particularly, this habit is associated with Protestant meditational practices in seventeenth-century England: the devotional stance toward the world of things that reads material reality as speaking pictures of spiritual truths. The English makers of emblem books in the seventeenth century (George Wither, Francis Quarles, Geoffrey Whitney), like the Dutch emblematisers (Jacob Cats) and genre painters, read the natural and social world as a book of illustrations for moral and spiritual benefit. Bishop Joseph Hall in *The Art of Divine Meditation* (1606) and *Occasional Meditations* (1633) described emblematic sensibility as follows:

Man is placed in this stage of the world to view the several natures and actions of the creatures;.... God is wronged if His creatures be unregarded; ourselves most

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Christopher Tilmouth, 'Early Poems and Prose: Some Hidden Continuities' in *Young Milton: Emerging Author, 1620-1642*, ed. by Edward Jones (Oxford: Oxford, 2013), pp. 280-307.

<sup>15</sup> See Derek Hirst and Steven N. Zwicker, *Andrew Marvell: Orphan of the Hurricanes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), esp. Chapter 4, 'Secrecies and Disclosures'.



of all if we read this great volume of the creatures and take out no lesson for our instruction....

there is no creature, event, action, speech which may not afford us new matter of meditation.... If thy inward eyes see not their use as well as thy bodily eyes their shape, I know not whether is more reasonable or less brutish.<sup>16</sup>

*Contra* Samuel Johnson, Joseph Hall proposes that a lively sanctified wit will seek out mundane and exotic comparisons and similitudes from the theatre of God's glory for devotional purposes: the movement of the heavens, an eclipse of the sun, a gliding star, a fair prospect, a cloud, a tree full blossomed, rain in the sunshine, a glowworm, the smell of a rose, and so forth. In the context of this discussion of Marvell's 'On a Drop of Dew', Hall's meditation 'Upon the Sight of a Fair Pearl' is an especially appropriate example of this emblematic perception:

What a pure and precious creature is this, which yet is taken out of the mud of the sea! Who can complain of a base original when he sees such excellencies so descended? These shellfishes that have no sexes and therefore are made out of corruption, what glorious things they yield to adorn and make proud the greatest princesses! God's great work goes not by likelihoods. How easily can He fetch glory out of obscurity who brought all out of nothing!<sup>17</sup>

God's omnipotence in creation *ex nihilo* is applied to the miraculous salvation of the sinner as illustrated by the pure and precious pearl.

Not only is 'On a Drop of Dew' patterned after the emblemizing sensibility as practiced by Hall, it relies on the more specific genre of the emblem book that Marvell would have encountered in Holland, France, Italy, and England. As John Manning has shown, the emblem book was a genre rich and diverse in its theory and practice, with images and mottos serving purposes across ideological, theological and artistic divides over more than a century of immense popularity in Europe.<sup>18</sup> Despite this diversity, the emblem commonly consists of interactive relations on the page with image and word, between the page and the reader, and beyond the reader in the visible world around him or her. Thus, not unlike the figures of simile and metaphor, the emblem book demanded of the reader

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph Hall, *Bishop Joseph Hall and Protestant Meditation in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. by Frank Livingstone Huntley (Binghamton: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1981), pp. 73-4 and 74-5.

<sup>17</sup> Hall, p. 183.

<sup>18</sup> John Manning, *The Emblem* (London: Reaktion, 2002), p. 34.

an active process of contextualization to establish intra-, inter-, and extra-textual relations. The hermeneutics of the emblem book also consisted of a series of translations: from the visual image to the Latin motto and the accompanying poem in the vernacular. In each stage of translation, the reader encountered the same central idea through a different medium, realizing a conceptual unity in the diversity of symbolic forms.

Marvell's 'Drop of Dew' is not technically an emblem, in that it does not present the reader with an engraving or woodcut of the image that is interpreted in the text.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the poem is conceptually or structurally like an emblem, in that the first eighteen lines present the picture, the second eighteen lines present the meaning, and the final four lines present a concluding observation—the principle to be learned from the image and word. The Italian writer Paolo Giovio, in his five rules for the invention of emblems, noted that the relationship of the image and the poem is like that the body and soul. In Samuel Daniel's translation of Giovio's *Dialogo dell'Imprese* (1555), the relevant passage reads as follows:

It [the *impresa*] must have a posie which is the soule of the body, which ought to differ in *Idioma* of him which beareth the *Impresa*, to the ende the sense may be more couered. . . . And to make apparent these properties, you shal vnderstand that the body and soule aboue mentioned, is meant either by the mot or by the subiect, and an *Impresa* is accounted vnperfect when the subiect or body beare no proportion of meaning to the soule, or the soule to the body.<sup>20</sup>

Remarkably, the perfect symmetry in Marvell's poem on the soul echoes the just proportion of the image (body) and the description (soul) in Giovio. The two parts of the simile (18 + 18 lines) adhere at the same time to the equal balance of concrete image and conceptual counterpart that Giovio specified as the body and soul of the emblem. The final four lines of the poem, falling outside the frame of the emblem, acquire significance as the clue to solving the impasse between the two parts of the comparison:

Such did the manna's sacred dew distil;  
White, and entire, though congealed and chill.  
Congealed on earth: but does, dissolving, run

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<sup>19</sup> Smith, *Poems*, 38 and 42, refers to Henry Hawkins, *Partheneia Sacra: or the Mysterious and Delicious Garden of the Sacred Parathenes* (1633), a proper emblem book. The sixth 'symbol' is 'The Deaw' which the Jesuit Hawkins reads by means of device, moral, essay, discourse, poesie, theories, and apostrophe as an allegory of the Incarnation.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel Daniel, *The Worthy Tract of Paulus Iouius* (London: Simon Waterson, 1585), Biii<sup>v</sup>-Biiii<sup>i</sup>.

Into the glories of th'Almighty Sun. (37-40)

'Manna' here does not introduce another simile or metaphor, but functions as the allusion that unlocks the meaning of the emblem; the biblical reference provides an authority that transcends the natural and aesthetic domains of the poem to conclude the emblem of the dewdrop. Like simile, metaphor, and emblem, allusion is a form of reference that heightens the reader's awareness of the relationships between things.

The biblical account of God's provision of the wonder bread of manna in the wilderness is found in Exodus 16:13-15:

in the morning the dew lay round about the host. And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, 'This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat'.

In Numbers 11, the manna is described 'as coriander seed, and the colour thereof as the colour of bdellium' (11:7). In the New Testament, when people come to Jesus for a sign from heaven, Jesus reveals the messianic significance of the manna in the wilderness: 'the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world... And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life' (John 6:33-35). The bread of life to which Jesus refers is his own flesh: first, the broken body on the cross that brings eternal life through faith; second, the broken bread of the eucharist that nourishes faith. As in 'Upon Appleton House', where 'Rails rain for quails, for manna, dew' (408), Marvell makes no attempt here to provide a direct Christological interpretation of the bread from heaven. Instead, the allusion turns the reader from theology to alchemy, uneasily combining the biblical allusion with the language of distillation, congealment, and dissolution in the final lines of the poem.

#### **4. Chemical and Hypostatic Bonding**

Thus far, 'On a Drop of Dew' has been a poem whose formal and informal structure relies on the figure of simile, where something material corresponds to something immaterial, as well as on the emblem form and on the emblemizing sensibility, where the book of nature is read to represent the book of the spirit. In both the simile and the emblem, the mode of comparison is by correspondence, formally and informally, of the physical sign and its transcendent referent. With both the simile and the emblem, the process of

comparison remains ideal, in the imagination; nevertheless, in the case of the emblem, the image is the physical representation of the material object and the related poem is the mental representation of the idea—the picture is the body, the explanation is the soul. The final four lines of the poem now present us with the possibility of relating these formal poetic correspondences with the relationship between the body and the soul:

Such did the manna's sacred dew distil;  
White, and entire, though congealed and chill.  
Congealed on earth: but does, dissolving, run  
Into the glories of th'Almighty Sun. (37-40)

The first eighteen lines of the poem seem to denigrate nature, something that does not square with Marvell's thoughtful depiction of the physical world in his 'Mower' poems; in his country-house poems for his patron, Thomas Fairfax ('Upon the Hill and Grove at Bilbrough' and 'Upon Appleton House'); in his pastoral lyrics ('A Dialogue Between Thyrsis and Dorinda' and 'Ametas and Thestylis Making Hay-Ropes'); and in his garden poems ('The Picture of Little T.C. in a Prospect of Flowers' and 'The Garden'). So what is there in the allusions to manna and alchemy in the final four lines of this poem that prevent the poem from siding either with Platonism or Nominalism?

The three verbs that Marvell uses to describe the process by which the manna-dew was transmogrified all have chemical connotations. In his edition of Marvell at line 37 of 'On a Drop of Dew', Smith provides the sense from the *Oxford English Dictionary* of 'distil' as 'rain down'. Indeed, this word is the verb used in the Authorised Version in Psalm 78, a psalm that recounts the miracle of manna in the wilderness: 'he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, and had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them the corn of heaven' (78:23-24).

Taken collectively, however, the three verbs in the final four lines (distil, congeal, and dissolve) suggest a range of chemical, possibly alchemical, associations current in the mid-seventeenth century. The *Oxford English Dictionary* further defines 'distil' as follows:

To subject to the process of distillation; to vaporize a substance by means of heat, and then condense the vapour by exposing it to cold, so as to obtain the substance or one of its constituents in a state of concentration or purity. Primarily said of a liquid, the vapour of which when condensed is again deposited in minute drops of pure liquid; but extended also to the volatilizing of solids, the products of which

may be gaseous. To become vaporized and then condensed into liquid. *fig.* To extract the quintessence of; to concentrate, purify.

Both Marvell's familiarity with chemical terminology (witness the Mayerne references in 'Upon the Death of Lord Hastings') and the context in the poem suggest that Marvell is using 'distil' in the sense of a chemical process: the 'sacred Dew' is condensed by means of heat so as to obtain the substance in a concentrated or pure state. As in the biblical account, when the dew disappeared, small round things were left on the ground, like hoarfrost.

The verb 'congeal' in the natural philosophical sense in the seventeenth century means 'convert, by freezing, from a fluid or soft to a solid and rigid state, as water into ice' (*OED*). The verb 'dissolve' reverses the process of condensation and congealment, converting the solid back into liquid form. In other words, the final four lines of the poem suggest a process of transmutation: the divine element takes on solid form in its descent from hot-heaven to cold-earth (dew into manna), only to have such 'congealed and chill' solidity eventually dissolved in the presence of 'th'Almighty Sun'. The miraculous process of the heavenly dew becoming earthly manna until it is reconstituted in transcendent form suggests yet another powerful analogy—the incarnation of the Son of God—that brings together body and soul, earth and heaven, and human and divine.

If the Bible supplied seventeenth-century writers with the analogy of manna and incarnation, other texts developed the analogy of pearls and the Son's appearance in the flesh. In *A Prospective Glass to Look into Heaven* (1618), John Vicars presents the reader with a vision of the New Jerusalem, interlacing descriptions from the Book of the Apocalypse with 'similes' that reveal their symbolic value. After describing the twelve pearly gates, Vicars continues in a passage about the incarnation that is worth citing at length in the context of 'On a Drop of Dew':

So these twelve Ports are all One Pearl most rare,  
Even God the Son whence they derived are.  
But here this one Objection may acruē,  
How it may come to pass, a Pearl should show  
And represent this Man-God, Christ our King?  
To which Objection I this Answer bring:  
That as the Shell wherein the Pearl doth grow,  
(Which Pliny plainly in his work doth show)  
Doth at a certain season gape and yawn,  
And without any generating Spawn,

Draws into it a Dew from forth the Air;  
 Which, by the Sea, I'th' Shell grows Orient fair,  
 And of this Dew doth more coagilate,  
 Than 'tis of earthly stuff coaugmentate:  
 Even so, the Holy Ghost from Heav'ns high frame,  
 Upon the blessed Virgin Mary came;  
 And God's eternal power, whose breath All made,  
 Did so Christ's Virgin-Mother over-shade:  
 That without any Human copulation,  
 Christ in her Womb took on him Incarnation.  
 Yet so, as that his powerful Divinity  
 Was still assistant unto his Humanity, ...  
 Being thus most perfect God and Man indeed,  
 Knowing our wants, to help us in our need.<sup>21</sup>

With Joseph Hall's meditation 'Upon a Pearl' in mind, Vicars's use of this simile for the incarnation is logical. The soul, like Christ in his complete divinity, enters the body; two natures in one person—combined in as miraculous conception as the generation of a pearl—existing hypostatically. Like Marvell in 'On a Drop of Dew', Vicars combines the imagery of the pearl and dew with chemical terminology ('coagulate', 'coaugmentate'). Unlike Vicars, Marvell combines the historical (manna), theological (incarnation), chemical (distillation), and aesthetic (simile) into an oblique theory of the process of the soul's incarnation in bodily form.

In 'On a Drop of Dew', then, being human means existing in the dynamic relationship of spirit and matter, soul and body: unity without confusion, distinction without dualism. The poem seems to suggest in the image of the dewdrop that the soul encloses within itself 'its native element', its sacredness and divinity. But rather than a Platonic dualism or a Manichean denigration of the body, Marvell's naturalistic image for the soul assumes St. Paul's notion of resurrection in I Corinthians 15:44: 'It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body'. Distinction and differentiation, as well as coherence and collaboration, between two terms in a simile, two media in an emblem, two texts in the analogy, and two senses in language, characterize the states of the body and soul in the ecology of personhood in this poem. Such dynamic interaction between sameness and difference is the essence of the logical process of analogy, the rhetorical effect of simile, the emblematic interplay of image and explanation, and the alchemical hermeneutics of

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<sup>21</sup> John Vicars, *A Prospective Glass look into Heaven; or, the Celestial Canaan Described* (London: John Smethwicke, 1618), C5v-C6r.

association that constitutes the formal characteristics of 'On a Drop of Dew'. Thus, beside the relationships of 'body and soul' and 'matter and spirit', the poem embodies its own coagulation and coaugmentation of theme and embodiment, form and content.<sup>22</sup>

The poem in *Miscellaneous Poems* with which 'On a Drop of Dew' is most closely related is 'Eyes and Tears', which exhibits similar metaphysical wit in playing with form and image. In the effective deployment of rhyming couplet, chiasmus, and parallel, 'Eyes and Tears' plays continually with balancing—'in equal poise' (11)—the two halves of a single image 'Till eyes and tears be the same things' (54) in the final stanza of the poem. Like 'On a Drop of Dew', the primary state of 'Eyes and Tears' is liquid, albeit across a wider range of water references that include sailing ('wat'ry lines and plummets', 8) and childbirth ('chaste lady's pregnant womb', 34). 'Eyes and Tears' comes especially close in Stanzas VI and VII to the final four lines of 'On a Drop of Dew':

So the all-seeing sun each day  
Distills the world with chemic ray;  
But finds the essence only show'rs,  
Which straight in pity back he pours. [...]  
And, to preserve their sight more true,  
Bathe still their eyes in their own dew. (21-24, 27-28)

The alliteration of 'dew distil' and 'does, dissolving' in the final lines of 'On a Drop of Dew' draws attention to images of distillation and dissolution that we also find in 'Eyes and Tears'. Not only do we find there similar alliterations in 'clouds dissolving, drop [i.e., drip]' (49), Stanza VI assigns an alchemical role to the sun: 'the all-seeing sun each day / Distills the world with chemic ray' (21-22). Alchemy is a vital link between 'Eyes and Tears' and 'On a Drop of Dew'. Instead of a universe, in 'On a Drop of Dew' it is a soul that thaws and resolves itself into a dew to 'run / Into the glories of th' Almighty Sun' (39-40).

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<sup>22</sup> Joan Faust, *Andrew Marvell's Liminal Lyrics: The Space Between* (Newark: University of Delaware, 2012), pp. 124-9, argues that the dewdrop exists in a middle space between earth and heaven. I am arguing that the alchemical allusion in the 'manna coda' suggests that the metaphor for the soul is that of transmutation from one state into another rather than that of transportation from one place to another.