

ANDREW MARVELL

1621-1678

Andrew Marvell's finest poems are second to none in this or any other period. He wrote less than Donne, Jonson, and Herbert did, but his range was in some ways greater, as he claimed both the private worlds of love and religion and the public worlds of political and satiric poetry and prose. His overriding concern with art, his elegant, well-crafted, limpid style, and the cool balance and reserve of some poems align him with Jonson. Yet his paradoxes and complexities of tone, his use of dramatic monologue, and his witty, dialectical arguments associate him with Donne. Above all, he is a supremely original poet, so complex and elusive that it is often hard to know what he really thought about the subjects he treated. Many of his poems were published posthumously in 1681, some thirty years after they were written, by a woman who claimed to be his widow but was probably his housekeeper. So their date and order of composition is often in doubt, as is his authorship of some anonymous works.

The son of a Church of England clergyman, Marvell grew up in Yorkshire, attended Trinity College, Cambridge (perhaps deriving the persistent strain of Neoplatonism in his poetry from the academics known as the Cambridge Platonists), ran off to London, and converted to Roman Catholicism until his father put an end to both ventures. He returned to Cambridge, took his degree in 1639, and stayed on as a scholar until his father's death in 1641. During the years of the civil wars (1642-48), he traveled in France, Italy, Holland, and Spain; much later he said of the Puritan "Good Old Cause" that it was "too good to have been fought for." While his earliest poems associate him with royalists, those after 1649 celebrate the Commonwealth and Oliver Cromwell; although he is sometimes ambivalent, Marvell recognizes divine providence in the political changes. From 1650 to 1652 he lived at Nunappleton as tutor to the twelve-year-old daughter of Thomas Fairfax, who had given over his command of the parliamentary army to Cromwell because he was unwilling to invade Scotland. In these years of retirement and ease, Marvell probably wrote most of his love lyrics and pastorals as well as *Upon Appleton House*. Subsequently he was tutor to Cromwell's ward, William Dutton, and traveled with him on the Continent; in 1657 he joined the blind Milton, at Milton's request, in the post of Latin secretary to Cromwell's Council of State. Marvell accepted the Restoration but maintained his own independent vision and his abiding belief in religious toleration, a mixed state, and constitutional government. He helped his friend Milton avoid execution for his revolutionary polemics and helped negotiate Milton's release from a brief imprisonment. Elected a member of Parliament in 1659 from his hometown, Hull, in Yorkshire, he held that post until 1678, focusing his attention on the needs of his district; on two occasions he went on diplomatic missions—to Holland and Russia. His (necessarily anonymous) antiroyalist polemics of these years include several verse satires on Charles II and his ministers, as well as his best-known prose work, *The Rehearsal Transposed* (1672-73), which defends Puritan dissenters and denounces censorship with verve and wit. He also wrote a brilliant poem of criticism and interpretation on Milton's *Paradise Lost* that was prefixed to the second edition (1674).

Many of Marvell's poems explore the human condition in terms of fundamental dichotomies that resist resolution. In religious or philosophical poems like "The Coronet" or "The Dialogue Between the Soul and Body," the conflict is between nature and grace, or body and soul, or poetic creation and sacrifice. In love poems

such as "The Definition of Love" or "To His Coy Mistress," it is often between flesh and spirit, or physical sex and platonic love, or idealizing courtship and the ravages of time. In pastorals like the Mower poems and "The Garden," the opposition is between nature and art, or the fallen and the Edenic state, or violent passion and contentment. Marvell's most subtle and complex political poem, "An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland," sets stable traditional order and ancient right against providential revolutionary change, and the goods and costs of retirement and peace against those of action and war. *Upon Appleton House* also opposes the attractions of various kinds of retirement to the duties of action and reformation.

Marvell experimented with style and genre to striking effect. Many of his dramatic monologues are voiced by named, naive personas—the Mower, the Nymph—who stand at some remove from the author. "To His Coy Mistress," perhaps the best known of the century's *carpe diem* poems, is voiced by a witty and urbane speaker in balanced and artful couplets. But its rapid shifts from the world of fantasy to the charnal house of reality raise questions as to whether this is a clever seduction poem or a probing of existential angst, and whether Marvell intends to endorse or critique this speaker's view of passion and sex. In *Upon Appleton House* Marvell transforms the static, mythic features of Jonson's country-house poem "To Penshurst" to create a poem that incorporates history and the conflicts of contemporary society. It assimilates to the course of providential history the topographical features of the Fairfax estate, the Fairfax family myth of origin, the experiences of the poet-tutor on his progress around the estate, and the activities and projected future of the daughter of the house. In the poem's rich symbolism, biblical events—Eden, the first temptation, the Fall, the wilderness experience of the Israelites—find echoes in the experiences of the Fairfax family, the speaker, the history of the English Reformation, and the wanton destruction of the recent civil wars.

FROM POEMS¹

To His Coy Mistress

- Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day.
5 Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber would complain.² I would
Love you ten years before the Flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
10 Till the conversion of the Jews.³ My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow;
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
15 Two hundred to adore each breast,

1. Marvell's lyrics were published posthumously in 1681.

2. The exotic river Ganges in India is on one side of the world, the Humber River flows past Marvell's city, Hull, on the opposite side. Complaints are poems of plaintive, unavailing love.

3. Popular belief had it that the Jews were to be converted just before the Last Judgment. The exaggerated offers in this stanza play off against conventional hyperbolic declarations of love in Petrarchan poetry.

But thirty thousand to the rest:
 An age at least to every part,
 And the last age should show your heart.
 For, lady, you deserve this state,^o
 Nor would I love at lower rate.
 But at my back I always hear
 Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;
 And yonder all before us lie
 Deserts of vast eternity.
 Thy beauty shall no more be found,
 Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
 My echoing song; then worms shall try
 That long-preserved virginity,
 And your quaint⁴ honor turn to dust,
 And into ashes all my lust:
 The grave's a fine and private place,
 But none, I think, do there embrace.
 Now therefore, while the youthful hue
 Sits on thy skin like morning dew,⁵
 And while thy willing soul transpires
 At every pore with instant fires,⁶
 Now let us sport us while we may,
 And now, like amorous birds of prey,
 Rather at once our time devour
 Than languish in his slow-chapped⁷ power.
 Let us roll all our strength and all
 Our sweetness up into one ball,
 And tear our pleasures with rough strife
 Thorough^o the iron gates of life:⁸
 Thus, though we cannot make our sun
 Stand still, yet we will make him run.⁹

ca. 1650–52

1681

The Definition of Love

My Love is of a birth as rare
 As 'tis, for object, strange and high;
 It was begotten by Despair
 Upon Impossibility.
 Magnanimous Despair alone
 Could show me so divine a thing,
 Where feeble Hope could ne'er have flown
 But vainly flapped its tinsel wing.

4. "Quaint" puns on "out of date" and *queynte*, a term for the female genitals.

5. The text reads "glew," which could be correct, but "dew" is a common emendation.

6. Urgent, sudden enthusiasm. "Transpires": breathes forth.

7. Slowly devouring jaws.

8. One manuscript reads "grates," a somewhat different figure for the sexual act proposed.

9. The sun stood still for Joshua (Joshua 10.12) in his war against Gibeon; see the very different resolution in Donne's "The Sun Rising" (p. 672).

And yet I quickly might arrive
Where my extended soul is fixed;¹
10 But Fate does iron wedges drive,
And always crowds itself betwixt.

For Fate with jealous eye does see
Two perfect loves, nor lets them close;²
15 Their union would her ruin be,
And her tyrannic power depose.²

And therefore her decrees of steel
Us as the distant poles have placed
(Though Love's whole world on us doth wheel),³
20 Not by themselves to be embraced,

Unless the giddy heaven fall,
And earth some new convulsion tear,
And, us to join, the world should all
Be cramped into a planisphere.⁴

25 As lines, so loves oblique may well
Themselves in every angle greet;⁵
But ours, so truly parallel,
Though infinite, can never meet.

Therefore the Love which us doth bind,
30 But Fate so enviously debars,
Is the conjunction of the mind,
And opposition of the stars.⁶

ca. 1650-52

1681

The Mower to the Glowworms

Ye living lamps, by whose dear light
The nightingale does sit so late,
And studying all the summer night
Her matchless songs does meditate,

5 Ye country comets, that portend
No war nor prince's funeral,
Shining unto no higher end
Than to presage the grass's fall;

1. The soul has extended itself from the speaker's body and fixed itself to his lover.
2. Two perfections, united, would not be subject to change and thereby to Fate.
3. Rotates as on its axis.
4. A two-dimensional map of the world; Marvell images a round globe collapsed into a flat pancake shape, top to bottom, which would bring

the two poles together.

5. Oblique lines can touch in angles, as might "oblique" lovers that (in one meaning of the term) "deviate from right conduct or thought."

6. "Conjunction" is the coming together of two heavenly bodies in the same sign of the zodiac; "opposition" places them at diametrical opposites.

Ye glowworms, whose officious^o flame
 10 To wand'ring mowers shows the way,
 That in the night have lost their aim,
 And after foolish fires^o do stray; *will-o'-the-wisps*

Your courteous fires in vain you waste,
 Since Juliana here is come,
 15 For she my mind hath so displaced
 That I shall never find my home.

ca. 1650–52

1681

The Mower's Song

My mind was once the true survey
 Of all these meadows fresh and gay,
 And in the greenness of the grass
 Did see its hopes¹ as in a glass;^o
 5 When Juliana came, and she,
 What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and me.²

mirror

But these, while I with sorrow pine,
 Grew more luxuriant still and fine,
 That not one blade of grass you spied
 10 But had a flower on either side;
 When Juliana came, and she,
 What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and me.

Unthankful meadows, could you so
 A fellowship so true forego,
 15 And in your gaudy May-games³ meet,
 While I lay trodden under feet?
 When Juliana came, and she,
 What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and me.

But what you in compassion ought
 20 Shall now by my revenge be wrought,
 And flowers, and grass, and I, and all,
 Will in one common ruin fall;
 For Juliana comes, and she,
 What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and me.

25 And thus ye meadows, which have been
 Companions of my thoughts more green,
 Shall now the heraldry become
 With which I shall adorn my tomb;

1. Green is the color of hope.
 2. The alexandrine (twelve-syllable line) used here is the only example of a refrain in Marvell.

3. Festivals and merrymaking marked the first of May, May Day.

For Juliana comes, and she,
 30 What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and me.

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1681

The Garden

How vainly men themselves amaze^o
 To win the palm, the oak, or bays,¹
 And their uncessant labors see
 Crowned from some single herb or tree,
 5 Whose short and narrow-vergèd^o shade
 Does prudently their toils upbraid;^o
 While all flowers and all trees do close^o
 To weave the garlands of repose!

bewilder

edged

reprove

unite, agree

Fair Quiet, have I found thee here,
 10 And Innocence, thy sister dear?
 Mistaken long, I sought you then
 In busy companies of men.
 Your sacred plants, if here below,^o
 Only among the plants will grow;
 15 Society is all but rude,
 To^o this delicious solitude.

on earth

compared to

No white nor red² was ever seen
 So amorous as this lovely green.
 Fond lovers, cruel as their flame,
 20 Cut in these trees their mistress' name:
 Little, alas, they know or heed
 How far these beauties hers exceed!
 Fair trees, wheresoe'er your barks I wound,
 No name shall but your own be found.³

25 When we have run our passion's heat,
 Love hither makes his best retreat.
 The gods, that mortal beauty chase,
 Still^o in a tree did end their race:
 Apollo hunted Daphne so,
 30 Only that she might laurel grow;
 And Pan did after Syrinx speed,
 Not as a nymph, but for a reed.⁴

always

What wondrous life is this I lead!
 Ripe apples drop about my head;
 35 The luscious clusters of the vine
 Upon my mouth do crush their wine;

1. Honors, respectively, for military, civic, and poetic achievement.

2. Colors traditionally associated with female beauty.

3. Marvell proposes to carve in the bark of trees not "Sylvia" or "Laura," but "Beech" and "Oak."

4. Apollo, the god of poetry, chased Daphne until she turned into a laurel (the emblematic reward of poets); Pan pursued Syrinx until she became a reed, out of which he made panpipes. The gods' motives were, of course, sexual, not horticultural.

The nectarine and curious^o peach
 Into my hands themselves do reach;
 Stumbling on melons⁵ as I pass,
 40 Ensnared with flowers, I fall on grass.

exquisite

Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,
 Withdraws into its happiness;
 The mind, that ocean where each kind
 Does straight^o its own resemblance find;⁶
 45 Yet it creates, transcending these,
 Far other worlds and other seas,
 Annihilating all that's made
 To a green thought in a green shade.

immediately

Here at the fountain's sliding foot,
 50 Or at some fruit tree's mossy root,
 Casting the body's vest^o aside,
 My soul into the boughs does glide:
 There like a bird it sits and sings,
 Then whets^o and combs its silver wings,
 55 And, till prepared for longer flight,
 Waves in its plumes the various light.⁷

garment

preens

Such was that happy garden-state,
 While man there walked without a mate:
 After a place so pure and sweet,
 60 What other help could yet be meet!⁸
 But 'twas beyond a mortal's share
 To wander solitary there:
 Two paradises 'twere in one
 To live in paradise alone.

How well the skillful gardener drew
 65 Of flowers and herbs this dial new,⁹
 Where from above the milder sun
 Does through a fragrant zodiac run;
 And as it works, th' industrious bee
 70 Computes its time¹ as well as we!
 How could such sweet and wholesome hours
 Be reckoned but with herbs and flowers?

ca. 1650–52

1681

5. "Melons," with etymological roots in the Greek word for "apple," may recall the apple over which all humankind stumbled.

6. As the ocean supposedly contained a counterpart of every creature on land, so the ocean of the mind holds the innate ideas of all things (in Neoplatonic philosophy).

7. The multicolored light of this world, contrasted with the white radiance of eternity.

8. Genesis 2.18 recounts the Lord's decision to make a "help meet" for Adam, Eve.

9. The garden itself is laid out as a sundial.

1. With a pun on "thyme."



The Execution of Charles I. A German print illustrates the beheading of Charles I before an enormous crowd, on a scaffold erected in front of the Banqueting House. At the top of the picture small portraits of General Fairfax and Cromwell, leaders of the Parliamentary forces, flank a portrait of King Charles, to whom an angel in the clouds is extending a heavenly crown. In the lower right corner, a woman faints.

An Horatian Ode

*Upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland*¹

The forward^o youth that would appear *eager, ambitious*
 Must now forsake his Muses dear,
 Nor in the shadows sing
 His numbers languishing:

5 'Tis time to leave the books in dust
 And oil th' unused armor's rust,
 Removing from the wall
 The corselet^o of the hall.² *upper body armor*

1. Oliver Cromwell, the general primarily responsible for Parliament's victory in the civil war, returned from conquering Ireland in May 1650, about eighteen months after the execution of Charles I. The two events were persistently connected: Cromwell's success in Ireland was taken as a sign of God's favor to the new republican regime and to Cromwell as his chosen instrument. Pindaric odes (like Jonson's *Cary-Morison ode*) are heroic and ecstatic; Horatian odes are

poems of cool and balanced judgment, as this one is in its representations of Cromwell, Charles I, and the issues of power and providence.

2. Here as elsewhere there are allusions to Lucan's *Pharsalia*, a poem of civil war whose sympathies are with Pompey, Cato, and the Roman Republic against Caesar and the empire. The poem's allusions to Caesar are most often to Charles I, but sometimes to Cromwell.

So restless Cromwell could not cease
 10 In the inglorious arts of peace,
 But through adventurous war
 Urgèd his active star;³

And, like the three-forked lightning, first
 Breaking the clouds where it was nursed,
 15 Did through his own side
 His fiery way divide;⁴

For 'tis all one to courage high,
 The emulous, or enemy;
 And with such, to enclose
 20 Is more than to oppose.

Then burning through the air he went,
 And palaces and temples rent;
 And Caesar's head at last
 Did through his laurels blast.⁵

25 'Tis madness to resist or blame
 The force of angry heaven's flame;
 And if we would speak true,
 Much to the man is due,

Who from his private gardens, where
 30 He lived reservèd and austere
 (As if his highest plot
 To plant the bergamot),⁶

Could by industrious valor climb
 To ruin the great work of time,
 35 And cast the kingdom old
 Into another mold;

Though Justice against Fate complain,
 And plead the ancient rights in vain:
 But those do hold or break,
 40 As men are strong or weak.

Nature that hateth emptiness,
 Allows of penetration less,⁷
 And therefore must make room
 Where greater spirits come.

3. Normally the stars are thought to control men's fates, but Cromwell presses his own star forward.

4. The "three-forked lightning" identifies him with Zeus, suggesting the elemental force by which he surpassed all those in his own party ("side") of radical Independents; the imagery

of giving birth to himself also suggests going of Caesar (born by cesarean section) one better.

5. Royal crowns were made of laurel because they were supposed to protect from lightning.

6. A pear-shaped orange (from the Turkish, "prince's pear").

7. Nature abhors a vacuum, but even more, the penetration of one body's space by another body.

- 45 What field of all the civil wars
Where his were not the deepest scars?
And Hampton shows what part
He had of wiser art;⁸
- Where, twining subtle fears with hope,
50 He wove a net of such a scope
That Charles himself might chase
To Caresbrooke's narrow case,
That thence the royal actor⁹ borne,
The tragic scaffold might adorn;
55 While round the armed bands
Did clap their bloody hands:
He nothing common did or mean
Upon that memorable scene,
But with his keener eye
60 The ax's edge¹ did try;
Nor called the gods with vulgar spite
To vindicate his helpless right;
But bowed his comely head
Down, as upon a bed.
- 65 This was that memorable hour,
Which first assured the forcèd power;
So when they did design
The Capitol's first line,
A bleeding head where they begun
70 Did fright the architects to run;
And yet in that the state
Foresaw its happy fate.²
- And now the Irish are ashamed
To see themselves in one year tamed;
75 So much one man can do,
That does both act and know:
They can affirm his praises best,
And have, though overcome, confessed

Charles was confined at Hampton Court after defeat, as Parliament attempted to negotiate for his restoration. Cromwell was rumored to have connived at his escape to Carisbrooke Castle, on the Isle of Wight, in order to convince Parliament that he could not be trusted and must be executed. Cromwell has shown himself master of the two "arts" of rule defined by Machiavelli, namely, force and craft. The theater metaphors used for Charles are more powerful because the "tragic scaffold"

fold" was erected outside Whitehall, where so many royal masques were produced. See a depiction of the king's execution on p. 757.

1. A play on the Latin *acies*, which means 'the edge of a sword or ax, a keen glance, and the vanguard of a battle.'

2. Livy and Pliny record that the workmen digging the foundations for a temple of Jupiter at Rome uncovered a bloody head which they were persuaded to take as an omen that Rome would be head (*caput*) of a great empire; the temple and the hill took the name Capitoline from that event.

80 How good he is, how just,
 And fit for highest trust.³

Nor yet grown stiffer with command,
But still in the republic's hand—
 How fit he is to sway,
 That can so well obey.⁴

85 He to the Commons' feet presents
 A kingdom for his first year's rents;
 And, what he may, forbears
 His fame to make it theirs;⁵

 And has his sword and spoils ungirt,
90 To lay them at the public's skirt:
 So, when the falcon high
 Falls heavy from the sky,

 She, having killed, no more does search,
 But on the next green bough to perch;
95 Where, when he first does lure,
 The falconer has her sure.

 What may not then our isle presume,
 While victory his crest does plume!
 What may not others fear,
100 If thus he crown each year!

 A Caesar he ere long to Gaul,
 To Italy an Hannibal,
 And to all states not free,
 Shall climactèric be.⁶

105 The Pict no shelter now shall find
 Within his parti-colored mind,
 But from this valor sad,[°]
 Shrink underneath the plaid;⁷

 Happy if in the tufted brake
110 The English hunter him mistake,
 Nor lay his hounds in near
 The Caledonian[°] deer.

severe, solemn

Scottish

3. Cromwell conducted a particularly brutal campaign in Ireland, and the Irish had no such testimonials for him; the lines are deeply equivocal.

4. The maxim about obedience fitting one to rule is a commonplace. The implications of "yet" and "still," along with the next stanza, suggest a Caesar figure who has not—but might—cross the Rubicon and defy the Republic, as Julius Caesar did.

5. Thus far, Cromwell gives the Republic credit for his victories.

6. It was thought that Cromwell's military acumen

men might subdue France and Italy (which threatened to attack the new republic to restore Charles II), just as did Caesar and Hannibal of old. "Climacteric": a period of crucial, epochal change—here, the expectation that the example of a successful English republic would topple absolute monarchs abroad.

7. Early Scots were called Picts (from the Latin *pictus*, painted), because the warriors painted themselves many colors; contemporary Scots are "parti-colored" (divided into many factions) like a scotch plaid. Cromwell was about to go to subdue Scotland, which had declared for Charles II.

But thou, the war's and Fortune's son,
 March indefatigably on;
 And for the last effect,
 Still keep thy sword erect;

115

Besides the force it has to fright
 The spirits of the shady night,⁸
 The same arts that did gain
 A power must it maintain.⁹

120

1681

650
 A sword carried with the blade upright evokes
 the classical tradition that underworld spirits
 (here, the slain king and his followers) are fright-
 ened off by raised weapons.

9. The maxim alludes to Machiavelli's advice
 that a kingdom won by force must for some time
 be maintained by force.