
UNIT 6 ANDREW MARVELL

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6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will be reading two well-known poems of Andrew Marvell. He shows the influence of John Donne, though he is also different from him.

On reading the Unit you will be able to:

- understand the range of metaphysical poetry,
- understand the distinctive achievement of Marvell whose lucidity of expression is quite appealing.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Andrew Marvell led a distinguished civil life as a teacher, a political activist and as an associate of John Milton. He had an opportunity to spend sometime in the rural countryside, a factor that shaped his poetic interests. There he had time to observe natural phenomena and the life of birds, trees and plants from close quarters. He has written about these things sometimes as a detached observer and sometimes as a person who is privy to their secrets:

*Thus I, easy philosopher
Among the birds and trees confer
And little now to me make wants
Or of the fowls, or of the plants*

He was also influenced by the poetry of Donne. He liked its candour, its bold romanticism and the playfulness of language with which things were expressed. With a little exercise he was able to catch up with the new style. Under Donne's influence he now wrote of love quite frankly – his persuasions of the bashful mistress make a delightful reading; his sensuousness creates a warmth and his arguments have an intellectual appeal.

There is a third element in his poetry – he writes of spiritual experiences which do not fit exactly with his puritan background. There is in them simply a realization of the release that moments of meditation provide to the soul, its distancing from the things corporeal and material and an aspiring after the heavenly and the ethereal.

A simplicity of utterance remained an important feature of all the phases of his writing which was also united by a well-directed growth of emotional life. From acute observations of Nature to romantic exuberances and then to a cultivation of mystical attitude, his journey can be likened to that of W.B. Yeats. Both of them remained rooted to deeply private experiences and yet they explored the spiritual moorings of human life.

Self-check Exercise

1) What are the principal themes of Andrew Marvell’s poetry?

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2) What influence did Donne exert on him?

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3) In what way is he different from other metaphysical poets?

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6.2 ANDREW MARVELL: LIFE AND WORKS

Andrew Marvell was born on March 31, 1621. His father was a clergyman and was later appointed Lecturer at Holy Trinity Church. For two years Andrew Marvell, on graduating from Cambridge University, served as a tutor to the daughter of Lord General Thomas Fairfax.

Andrew Marvell started writing and publishing poems when he was studying at Cambridge. He had interest in the political affairs of England, reflected in his *Horatian Ode* and *Character of Holland*. He had also a long association with Oliver Cromwell and John Milton. Because of his active political life he was

5 Whose short and **narrow-verged** shade
 Does **prudently** their toils **upbraid**;
 While all flowers and all trees do close
 To weave the garlands of **repose**!

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,
 Only among the plants will grow;
 15 Society is all but rude
 To this delicious solitude.

No white nor red 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.

25 When we have run our passion's heat,
 Love hither makes best **retreat**.
 The gods, that mortal beauty chase,
 Still 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.

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

Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,
 Withdraws into its happiness;
 The mind, that ocean where each kind
 Does straight its own resemblance find;
 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.
 Here at the fountain's sliding foot,

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

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!
 But 'twas beyond a mortal's share
 To wander solitary there:
 Two paradises 'twere in one
 To live in paradise alone.

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

6.3.1 Glossary

Incessant	: never-stopping (in a disapproving tone)
narrow-verged	: having a small area
prudently	: sensibly, carefully
upbraid	: to reproach, to criticize angrily
repose	: the state of rest
amorous	: showing love
retreat	: a place for rest, quiet and prayer
luscious	: having a strong pleasant taste
nectarine	: a round red and yellow fruit
annihilating	: destroying completely
vest	: a clothing worn next to the skin
whets	: increases the desire
Garden-state	: the state when Adam and Eve were in Paradise, free from fears of mortality and sin
Zodiac	: the imaginary area in the sky in which the sun, moon and planets appear to lie and which has been divided into twelve equal parts

- Apollo** : The sun god
- Pan** : the Greek god of shepherds and herdsmen, part man and part goat in appearance
- Daphne** : Zeus transformed Daphne into a laurel-tree to enable her to escape the passionate pursuit of Apollo
- Syrinx** : she was also changed into reeds when Pan chased her

5.3.2 Discussion

The title of the poem is self-revelatory. It is about the thoughts arising in the speaker when he is in a garden. The very situation is such that the speaker enjoys a quietness of mind. There is a scene of natural beauty spread before him which further augments this sense of quietude.

A new set of ideas come to mind in this condition. The thought process starts with a feeling of pleasant surprise, the realization that there is no use going anywhere in quest of peace which is available in such abundance in every corner in a garden. Peace cannot be found in the company of men; it is present in its most charming form in the garden. The poet visualizes peace as a beautiful maiden, good looking and inducing a state of calm.

The garden lies spread before the speaker in an expanse of green, a colour not associated with romance, and yet it arouses romantic ecstasy in him. This is so because his eyes can catch relics of lovers' activities in the garden: they have inscribed their names on the banks of trees. The pleasure is not only of sight; it is one of the saturation of all senses- there is fragrance and also the reaching of ripe fruits and vines into the mouth of the speaker.

From this pleasure there is a further ascent of the mind. For the first time the speaker is aware of the creative powers of mind, its power of creating a new world and also of being firmly concentrated in one attitude. This attitude the speaker names *a green thought in a green shade*. It is very difficult to specify this green thought – it is full of ambiguities, it may be a highly productive thought or it simply may be the habit of mind to take on the colour of the surroundings. A new vista is added to the experience of the speaker when he feels that his soul has flown out of the body and like a bird freed from a cage has taken seat among the branches of a tree of the garden. The soul in the form of the bird starts singing in an ecstasy of freedom. This is actually the culmination of the experience of the speaker. In the garden he first discovered a repose, then a satisfaction of all the senses, and finally a spiritual release. It is logical therefore for him to view the garden as a replica of Paradise, the first seat of man's ancestors. He can understand that in this garden the movement of time and change of seasons can be read only in terms of increasing fragrance and wholesomeness of herbs and flowers.

6.3.3 Appreciation

The most important feature of this poem is its symbolism. There are a number of symbols – garden, green, ocean, bird, flight etc. That these words mean more than what they literally suggest becomes obvious because of their repetition and also because of the context in which they have been used.

The speaker becomes aware of the immense value of the garden only gradually. It is a realization that comes to him in stages of clear apprehension, feelings and

thoughts. In the first stage there is the sense of peace and solitude, a state when the mind is quickened to respond to the beauty of this new environment. There is the second stage of sense-fulfilment, of fruits and vines pouring juices into the mouth of the speaker, instilling a new energy. However, this relish of fruit juices induces a new capacity of contemplation, of becoming aware of the several capacities of mind – of its becoming a repository of all experience, of its power of transcending experience and creating new worlds, and then of cancelling all and being firmly established in an attitude of total concentration. In the last the speaker experiences spiritual freedom – freedom from physicality, mortality and terrestrial restrictions.

There is an interplay of sensuousness and spirituality. To call solitude *delicious* is to communicate a pleasure with which the word is not associated. Solitude is a state of being alone with pleasant thoughts. But in the surroundings of the garden, full of herbs, flowers, fruits and vines, this can naturally become a thing of taste. You should also understand that sensuousness has not been seen as an obstruction; it has been presented as a stage leading to spiritual fulfilment. The suggestion is that it is only when the senses have been properly gratified that man can rise above bodily limitations and aspire for spiritual elevation.

The use of pagan references – Apollo – Daphne, Pan-Syrinx episodes – and of the Biblical story of Paradise create an exciting complexity in the poem. Both of them however emphasize that the herbs and plants of the garden constitute retreat from passion and create ideal atmosphere for realization of the spiritual potential of man.

Self-check Exercise I

1) Why does the speaker call society rude?

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2) What pleasures does the speaker enjoy in the garden?

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3) What functions of the mind does the speaker allude to?

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4) What role of the garden does the speaker talk of?

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6.4 POEM: 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
 Shoudst **rubies** find; I by the tide
 Of **Humber** would complain. I would
 Love you ten years before the flood,
 And you should, if you please, refuse
 10 Till the **conversion of the Jews**.
 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,
 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,
 20 Nor would I love at lower rate.
 But at my back I always hear
 Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
 And yonder all before us lie
 Deserts of vast eternity.
 25 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 quaint honor turn to dust,
 30 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,
 35 And while thy willing soul **transpires**
 At every pore with instant fires,
 Now let us sport us while we may,
 And now, like amorous birds of prey,
 Rather at once our time devour
 40 Than languish in his **slow-chapped** power.
 Let us roll all our strength and all
 Our sweetness up into one ball,
 And tear our pleasures with rough strife
 Through the iron gates of life:
 45 Thus, though we cannot make our sun
 Stand still, yet we will make him run.

6.4.1 Glossary

rubies	: red, precious gemstones, supposed to preserve virginity
Humber	: the Humber river flows through Marvell's nature town, Hull
conversion of Jew	: to occur, as Christian tradition holds, at the end of history
vegetable love	: love growing abundantly
transpires	: breathes out
slow-chapped power	: slowly consuming

6.4.2 Discussion

The poem is a clever presentation of the *carpe diem* philosophy – the view that the days of youth are short and so should be best used in the enjoyment of pleasures of love. The speaker presents this view before his sweetheart in order to persuade her to accept his proposal without delay since the end of youth is imminent and without youth there is no pleasure.

The satirical vein directed at the poor understanding of the lover is evident in the speaker's reference to the two continents where two rivers, the Ganges and the Humber, flow and maintain the division of the world. The lovers would have been by the banks of the two rivers and would have passed time in waiting if only they had the privilege of control over time. This is the beginning of a tedious argument – of the references to the beginning of the creation, its end and to the recent growth of European imperialism. All these historical stages have been crossed over a long stretch of time. Had the lovers had that much time in their disposal, the speaker would have taken a hundred years to look at her beautiful eyes and two hundred years to gaze at her breasts. All this is in hyperbolic mode, implying its sheer improbability.

The second stanza is downright realistic by contrast. The speaker turns to the vision of the old age and death. The marble body of his beloved would decay and perhaps they could unite only in the moment of death, of dust and ashes. The force of argument is strongest here as the beloved can be easily convinced of the futility of union in this state.

The third and the final stanza restores the brilliance of the scene with which the poem began. The speaker refers to the glowing skin of the beloved, to the fires burning in the cells of the body and suggests that the available time should be enjoyed in love – the only means to defeat time.

6.4.3 Appreciation

Having read the two poems of Andrew Marvell you can see for yourself with what great ease the poet could write poems of two different strains. *Thoughts In A Garden* is celebration of peace, solitude and spirituality; *To His Coy Mistress* is the celebration of youth and beauty in frankly erotic terms.

There reigns over such diversity of theme and style a definite influence of John Donne. He reiterated the power of rhetoric and ratiocination and also of the value of religious urge amidst the sinfulness of human life.

Marvell’s argument is marked by originality and copiousness. He contrasts the amplitude of time that characterizes the slow growth of civilization with the painful short duration of youth. Compared to the developments in the history of the world man’s life is short, and youth is even shorter. But can anything match the glory of youth?

Of the several rhetorical constructions and conceits you should note chiefly – *Time’s winged chariot* and *deserts of vast eternity*. They are perfectly in tune with the hyperbolic opening of the poem. But they are also examples of epigrammatic condensation. Time is flying in a non-stop chariot – a very dynamic image, a powerful suggestion of lack of man’s control over time. The visualization of eternity in the form of deserts stretched before the eyes is not exact as it is suggestive of the intense, hurting pain.

Self-check Exercise II

1) What is the crime of the lady?

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2) What could the speaker have done had they had time in their control?

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3) How does the speaker create a sense of decay and death?

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4) Write a detailed note on the argument in the poem.

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6.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we studied:

- the life and works of Andrew Marvell, noting the affinities between him and John Donne;
- two poems, having two different themes, in which the distinctive contribution of Marvell is well-represented.

6.6 SUGGESTED READING

For a detailed study you can consult the following books on Andrew Marvell:

H.M. Margoliouth, ed *Poems and Letters, 2 Vols*, Oxford, 1927, reprinted 1953

Bradbrook and Lloyd Thomas, *Andrew Marvell*, Cambridge, 1940

H.J.C. Grierson, *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century*, Oxford, 1921

6.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) Society is a disciplining institution. To call it rude is an example of paradox. Marvell calls society rude since it does not allow man's spiritual growth; it keeps him involved in the affairs of the world.
Elaborate the above idea.
- 2) The speaker enjoys in the garden peace, solitude and gratification of senses. There are pleasures of the initial stage. As he prolongs his stay the garden offers him a moment of release, an opportunity to rise above the limitations of the body.
- 3) Normally, mind is the organ that helps us organize disparate thoughts and experiences in a whole.
But Marvell alludes to a higher power of mind – it has God-like power to create and annihilate.
- 4) Go through Discussion and Appreciation.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) She is indifferent to the speaker's entreaties. In so far as it involves waste of youth, it is a crime.
- 2) The lady would have waited and the speaker would have spent thousands of years simply gazing at her body.
- 3) Consult Discussion.
- 4) Consult Discussion.

Alongside poets like John Dryden and John Milton, Andrew Marvell has earned a reputation as one of the most important 17th century English poets. His works are often classed as well with the work of other "metaphysical" poets, such as John Donne, Abraham Cowley, Henry Vaughn, Richard Crawshaw, and George Herbet. Like these poets, his "metaphysical" poetry often relies on complex and drawn-out comparisons ("conceits") which combine intricacy of abstraction with depth of feeling. In his Poems, readers get to see the best of Andrew Marvell's poetic work: his range of subject matter, his facility with human emotions, and his intelligence with his diction. "You, Andrew Marvell" is a short, meditative poem in nine four-line stanzas, with a simple rhyme scheme. The title refers to a seventeenth century poet, one of whose best-known poems is a carpe diem lyric entitled "To His Coy Mistress." Carpe diem means "seize the day." Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" invokes images of death and decay and of "Time's wing'd chariot hurrying near" as the speaker attempts to convince his beloved to be more receptive to his advances. Strictly speaking, "You, Andrew Marvell" is not a carpe diem poem, because it does not explicitly urge one to act or to reflect on one's own life's short span, but Archibald MacLeish's choice of title is a deliberate suggestion of the carpe diem genre. Download You, Andrew Marvell Study Guide. Subscribe Now. The real objective of Andrew Marvell in writing "The Garden" seems to have been to establish the superiority of a contemplative life over a life of action. True contemplation, according to the poet, is possible only in the green shade of a tree in a garden. A garden offers quiet and repose; and here one can enjoy the pleasures of the mind and soul as well as the pleasures of the sense.