

Andrew Marvell

Andrew Marvell was born on 31st March 1621 at Winestead in East Yorkshire where his father (also called Andrew) was rector. He was the first son after 3 daughters. Marvell's father had moved north from Cambridgeshire in 1608/9 to become a curate at Flamborough and in 1612 married Anne Pease – a Yorkshire lass. In 1624 the Marvell family moved to Hull where Andrew senior became a “lecturer” at Holy Trinity and master of the Charterhouse. They lived in a house north of the town walls on the banks



of the River Hull. It is widely believed that Marvell attended Hull Grammar School (near Holy Trinity Church), but official registers didn't begin until 1635 so there is no documentary evidence to prove this. In 1633 Marvell went to Trinity College Cambridge, he was just 12 years old – this was not an unusual age to enter university in the 17th century. His studies would have been based on logic, rhetoric and the skills of disputation as well as classical history and literature.

In 1637, at the age of 16, Marvell wrote his first published work, the University had put together a collection of Latin and Greek verses to celebrate the birth of King Charles I's fifth child Anne. Marvell's contribution was “Ad Regum Carolum Parodia”. However, tragedy was to strike the Marvell household soon after, Marvell's mother died in 1638 and his father drowned while crossing the Humber in 1640. After leaving Cambridge University in 1641 it is believed that Marvell travelled abroad possibly as the tutor to a young gentleman on the Grand Tour and returned in 1647. It is around this period that we find Marvell writing poetry again: “To His Noble Friend Mr Richard Lovelace, upon His Poems” appeared in 1648; there was a contribution to verses published in 1649 to mourn the death of the 20 year old Lord Hastings; and “An Horation Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland” appeared around June/July 1650.

Although Marvell lived through the English Civil War, the part he played in it and his affiliations are ambiguous. His poems to Lovelace and Lord Hastings demonstrate a Royalist attitude. His Horation Ode shows Cromwell's move to fill a void left by Charles I's incompetence and the deviousness of the parliamentary and military dissenters. Marvell was not the only person to be undecided about the conflict. Thomas Lord Fairfax had been General of the Army, but he resigned in July 1650 because he disapproved of the invasion of Scotland (the invasion had been undertaken because it was believed the Scots were intending to invade England on Charles II's behalf). Fairfax retired to his Yorkshire home, Nun Appleton House on the banks of the river

Wharfe (between Tadcaster and York). The house was so called because it was built on the site of a Cistercian Nunnery, there is still a house on the site today but it is not the one of this period. Marvell arrived at Nun Appleton some time after November 1650 to be tutor to Fairfax's daughter Mary. His stay at the Fairfax home prompted Marvell to write a poem in its praise – "Upon Appleton House, to My Lord Fairfax". The poem touches upon many aspects of Marvell's life: Fairfax's career, political and social issues and revives the Renaissance debates between art and nature.

Marvell left Nun Appleton in approximately 1652 and went to London where he became the tutor to William Dutton, a protégé of Oliver Cromwell. In 1654 Marvell wrote "The First Anniversary of the Government Under O.C." to celebrate Cromwell's first year as Lord Protector (which would have been on the 16th December 1654, the poem was probably not published until 1655). It is possibly at this period (though some scholars think it was as early as 1646) that Marvell wrote what is arguably his most famous poem – "To His Coy Mistress". With the opening lines:

Had we but world enough, and time,
This Coyness, Lady, were no crime.

and line 22: Time's winged chariot hurrying near

The poem has a *carpe diem* (seize the day) theme to it. However, the poem also demonstrates that Marvell had not forgotten his roots with the line "I by the tide of Humber would complain."

Marvell was abroad again in 1656, this time at Saumur with his pupil William Dutton. In 1657, having read the reports of an English naval victory, Marvell wrote the poem "On the Victory Obtained by Blake over the Spaniards, in the Bay of Santacruze, in the Island of Teneriff". This poem has often been viewed as an attempt by its author to curry favour with Cromwell. A ploy that may well have paid off, shortly after the poem was published Marvell got the post he had been seeking – that of Latin Secretary. Latin was the language used for diplomacy and communication and Marvell's duties while in the post would have included translating between Latin and English, drafting letters and documents and acting as translator for visiting foreign dignitaries.

On 3rd September 1658 Oliver Cromwell died of pneumonia. Marvell wrote the poem "A Poem upon the Death of O.C." which portrays Cromwell as a reluctant leader who would have preferred a quiet life. Marvell carried on in the post of Latin Secretary for some time after Cromwell's death. In December 1658 he wrote to his brother-in-law, Edmund Popple a Hull merchant, asking that he be elected as a burgess of Hull Corporation – the request was granted. Further political aspirations were to follow with Marvell's election on the 10th January 1659 as an MP for Hull in Richard Cromwell's government. However, this government was short lived and collapsed four months later and Marvell lost his seat to Sir Henry Vane. This was not the end of Marvell's political career. Charles II returned to London in triumph on the 29th May 1660 and the poet was re-elected as an MP for Hull on the 2nd April. This again emphasizes Marvell's political ambiguity, throughout the 1650s he had been associated with the anti-royalist cause now he was serving in a restoration government. The post as MP, as far as Marvell was concerned, would enable him to advance the interests of Hull businessmen. MPs were expected to write letters to their Corporation constituents and

he wrote some 300 to Hull Corporation (240 of these are held by Hull City Archives), reporting on any legislation that would affect business interests, negotiate on the Corporations behalf and even arrange bribes. A typical example of these letters is one dated 15th February 1669/70 which reads:

Gentlemen my very worthy friends:

We are again returned to sit in Parliament which I pray God may bring happiness to his Majesty and the Nation. I send you here inclosed his Majesty's speech together with that of the Lord Keeper. The House hereupon made a note that they would on Thursday next take his Majesty's speech into consideration and ordered that the same day the Commissioners of Accounts should attend...

Over the next 18 years Marvell was appointed to 120 committees, acted as teller in 8 divisions and made 14 speeches.

In 1664 Marvell travelled to Russia and Scandinavia as secretary to Lord Carlisle who was acting as trade ambassador for England, the trips were not a success. The 1660s also saw Marvell writing anonymous verse satires on foreign affairs. The autumn of 1672 saw the publication of Marvell's most famous prose work – *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*. Again this was published anonymously and was a defence of the King's policy on tolerating dissenters and catholics and opposes their persecution – Marvell was a supporter of toleration. The work takes its title from a contemporary play by the Duke of Buckingham – *The Rehearsal*. The first part of the work satirises Samuel Parker, a young Anglican divine and Archdeacon of Canterbury, who had formerly been a presbyterian but had changed his beliefs after the Reformation. Parker had an authoritarian notion of government especially on how matters of faith had to be controlled. Parker published a counter-attack to Marvell's work and the latter published a second part of the *Rehearsal Transpros'd* in response to that.

Toleration did not prosper nor did Charles II's parliament, it met for only eight months between 1671 and 1676. *An Account of the Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government in England* demonstrates that Marvell was a parliamentary man, it shows the workings of parliament and showed a belief that parliament had a necessary role to play in government. This pamphlet caused a stir in 1678, its printer was imprisoned and a reward offered for identifying its author.

Andrew Marvell, poet and politician died on 16th August 1678 in his rented house in Great Russell Street having just returned from a rare visit to Hull – it was on this journey that he caught a fever which brought about his death. He was buried in St. Giles-in-the-Fields on 18th August, Hull Corporation contributed to the funeral expenses and a memorial tablet. In 1681 the first collection of poems by Marvell was published under the title *Miscellaneous Poems*. It included the following notice to the reader: "...all these poems, as also the other things in this book contained, are printed according to the exact copies of my late dear Husband, under his own handwriting, being found since his death among his other papers, witness my Hand this 15th day October 1680. Mary Marvell" This was in fact Mary Palmer, Marvell's landlady for his lodgings in Westminster. The Great Russell Street lodgings had been taken in her name and were used to house Richard Thompson and Edward Nelthorpe, two Hull-born bankers who had gone bankrupt and were now fleeing their creditors. Edward

Nelthorpe had deposited £500 in Marvell's name at a goldsmiths. After Marvell's death Mary Palmer assumed his name in order to try and claim this £500, the collection of poetry was probably published to lend her credibility. Mary Palmer claimed she had married Marvell in May 1667 at Holy Trinity in the Little Minories, a fact she nor anyone else could prove or disprove because the registers were missing. She ceased to use Marvell's name after 1684 when Nelthorpe had got his money back.

In life Marvell had caused controversy with his works and even after his death the controversy continued with this alleged marriage. The absolute truth will probably never be known. Marvell as a poet and MP has continuously been in the public eye with the publication of his poetry and prose and biographies of his life and works. In 1921 a collection of essays – including a contribution from T.S. Eliot – were published to celebrate the Tercentenary of his birth; in 1978 the British Library held an exhibition to celebrate the Tercentenary of his death. Hull, the town Marvell went to school in and represented as an MP has not forgotten him. There has been a statue in Hull to Marvell since the 1860s, this has had various locations but in 1999 it was given a new home in the Market Place. The Hull Local Studies Library houses a collection of works by and about Marvell – a selected list of these follows.

Andrew Marvell's poetry

Crozier, Andrew. *The Works of Andrew Marvell*. Ware, 1995.

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Grosart, Rev. Alexander B. (ed.) *The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Andrew Marvell M.P.* Vols. I – IV. London, 1872-1875.

Kermode, Frank & Walker, Keith. *Andrew Marvell: a Selection of His Finest Poems*. Oxford, 1994.

Kermode, Frank. (ed.) *Andrew Marvell Selected Poetry*. New York & London, 1967.

Lord, George deF. (ed.) *Andrew Marvell Complete Poetry*. London, 1984.

Margoliouth, H.M. (ed.) *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell, vols. I & II*. London, 1971.

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Biographies on Andrew Marvell

Hall, Marie. *Andrew Marvell and His Friends: a Story of the Siege of Hull*. Hull, 1875.

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Murray, Nicholas. *World Enough and Time: the Life of Andrew Marvell*. London, 1999.

Critical studies of Marvell's work

Abraham, Lyndy. *Marvell and Alchemy*. Aldershot, 1990.

Bagguley, Wm. H. (ed.) *Andrew Marvell 1621-1678 Tercentenary Tributes*. London, 1922.

Bennett, Joan. *Five Metaphysical Poets*. London, 1964.

Brett, R.L. (ed.) *Andrew Marvell: Essays on the Tercentenary of His Death*. Oxford, 1979.

Condren, Conal & Cousins, A.D. *The Political Identity of Andrew Marvell*. Aldershot, 1990.

Craze, Michael. *The Life and Lyrics of Andrew Marvell*. London and Basingstoke, 1979.

Hodge, R.I.V. *Foreshortened Time: Andrew Marvell and 17th Century Revolutions*. Cambridge, 1978.

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Mazzeo, J.A. *Renaissance and Seventeenth-Century Studies*. London, 1964.

Patrides, C.A. et.al. *Approaches to Marvell: the York Tercentenary Lectures*. London, 1978.

Patterson, Annabel. *Writers and their Works: Andrew Marvell*. Plymouth, 1994.

Patterson, Annabel M. *Marvell and the Civic Crown*. Princeton, 1978.

Rees, Christine. *The Judgement of Marvell*. London, 1989.

Stocker, Margarita. *Apocalyptic Marvell: the Second Coming in Seventeenth Century Poetry*. Brighton, 1986.

Summers, Claude J. & Peabworth, Ted-Larry, eds. *On the Celebrated and Neglected Poems of Andrew Marvell*. Missouri, 1992.

Toliver, Harold E. *Marvell's Ironic Vision*. Yale, 1965.

Legouis, Pierre. *Andrew Marvell: Poet, Puritan, Patriot*. 2nd ed. London, 1968.

N.B. Many of the above items are available for loan

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