PART-I PAPER- I

ANDREW MARVELL: THE GARDEN, A DIALOGUE BETWEEN BODY AND SOUL

UNIT STUCTURE

Learning Objectives

Introduction

Metaphysical Poetry

Andrew Marvell: The Poet

The Texts of the Poems

Reading the Poems: Major Themes and Critical Reception of Andrew Marvell

Summing Up

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After going through this part of unit-I you will be able to

- Discuss metaphysical poetry
- Discuss the life and work of Andrew Marvell as a metaphysical poet
- Discuss the features of Marvell's poetry
- Make yourself familiar with the major themes of his poetry
- Examine and analyse his poetic style
- Discuss what is it that makes his poetry unique

ANDREW MARVELL: His LIFE & POETRY

Due to the inconsistencies and ambiguities within his work and the scarcity of information about his personal life, Andrew Marvell has been a source of fascination for scholars and readers since his work found recognition in the early decades of the twentieth century. Born on March 31, 1621, Marvell grew up in the Yorkshire town of Hull, England, where his father, Rev. Andrew Marvell, was a lecturer at Holy Trinity Church and master of the Charterhouse. At age twelve Marvell began his studies at Trinity College, Cambridge. Four years later, two of Marvell's poems, one in Latin and one in Greek, were published in an anthology of Cambridge poets. After receiving his bachelor's degree in 1639, Marvell stayed on at Trinity, apparently to complete a master's degree. In 1641, however, his father drowned in the Hull estuary and Marvell abandoned his studies. During the 1640's Marvell traveled extensively on the continent, adding Dutch, French, Spanish, and Italian to his Latin and Greek—missing the English civil wars entirely.

Marvell spent most of the 1650s working as a tutor, first for Mary Fairfax, daughter of a retired Cromwellian general, then for one of Oliver Cromwell's wards. Scholars believe that Marvell's greatest lyrics were written during this time. In 1657, due to John Milton's efforts on his behalf, Marvell was appointed Milton's Latin secretary, a post Marvell held until his election to Parliament in 1660.

A well-known politician, Marvell held office in Cromwell's government and represented Hull to Parliament during the Restoration. His very public position—in a time of tremendous political turmoil and upheaval—almost certainly led Marvell away from publication. No faction escaped Marvell's satirical eye; he

criticized and lampooned both the court and Parliament. Indeed, had they been published during his lifetime, many of Marvell's more famous poems—in particular, "Tom May's Death," an attack on the famous Cromwellian—would have made him rather unpopular with royalists and republicans alike.

Marvell used his political status to free Milton, who was jailed during the Restoration, and quite possibly saved the elder poet's life. In the early years of his tenure, Marvell made two extraordinary diplomatic journeys: to Holland (1662-1663) and to Russia, Sweden, and Denmark (1663-1665). In 1678, after 18 years in Parliament, Marvell died rather suddenly of a fever. Gossip of the time suggested that the Jesuits (a target of Marvell's satire) had poisoned him. After his death he was remembered as a fierce and loyal patriot.

Now considered one of the greatest poets of the seventeenth century, Marvell published very little of his scathing political satire and complex lyric verse in his lifetime. Although he published a handful of poems in anthologies, a collection of his work did not appear until 1681, three years after his death, when his nephew compiled and found a publisher for *Miscellaneous Poems*. The circumstances surrounding the publication of the volume aroused some suspicion: a person named "Mary Marvell," who claimed to be Marvell's wife, wrote the preface to the book. "Mary Marvell" was, in fact, Mary Palmer—Marvell's housekeeper—who posed as Marvell's wife, apparently, in order to keep Marvell's small estate from the creditors of his business partners. Her ruse, of course, merely contributes to the mystery that surrounds the life of this great poet. Marvell died on August 16, 1678.

TH E GARDEN

How vainly men themselves amaze
To win the palm, the oak, or bays,
And their uncessant labours see
Crown'd from some single herb or tree,
Whose short and narrow verged shade
Does prudently their toils upbraid;
While all flow'rs and all trees do close
To weave the garlands of repose.

Fair Quiet, have I found thee here,
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.
Society is all but rude,
To this delicious solitude.

No white nor red was ever seen
So am'rous as this lovely green.
Fond lovers, cruel as their flame,
Cut in these trees their mistress' name;
Little, alas, they know or heed
How far these beauties hers exceed!
Fair trees! wheres'e'er your barks I wound,

No name shall but your own be found.

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

What wond'rous life in this I lead!
Ripe apples drop about my head;
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,
Ensnar'd with flow'rs, 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,
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,
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;
And, till prepar'd for longer flight,
Waves in its plumes the various light.

Such was that happy garden-state,
While man there walk'd without a mate;
After a place so pure and sweet,
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.

How well the skillful gard'ner drew
Of flow'rs and herbs this dial new,
Where from above the milder sun
Does through a fragrant zodiac run;
And as it works, th' industrious bee

Computes its time as well as we.

How could such sweet and wholesome hours

Be reckon'd but with herbs and flow'rs!

Discussion of the Poem

"The Garden" begins with the speaker reflecting upon the vanity and inferiority of man's devotion to public life in politics, war, and civic service. Instead, the speaker values a retreat to "Fair Quiet" and its sister, "Innocence," in a private garden. The speaker portrays the garden as a space of "sacred plants," removed from society and its "rude" demands. He praises the garden for its shade of "lovely green," which he sees as superior to the white and red hues that commonly signify passionate love.

The speaker claims that when passion has run its course, love turns people towards a contemplative life surrounded by nature. He praises the abundance of fruits and plants in the garden, imagining himself tripping over melons and falling upon the grass. Meanwhile, his mind retreats into a state of inner happiness, allowing him to create and contemplate "other worlds and other seas." The speaker then returns to addressing the garden, where he envisions his soul releasing itself from his body and perching in the trees like a bird. He compares the scene to the "happy garden-state" of Eden, the Biblical paradise in which God created Adam and Eve. The poem ends with the speaker imagining the garden as its own cosmos, with a sun running through a "fragrant zodiac" and an "industrious bee" whose work computes the passage of time.

"The Garden" is divided into 9 numbered stanzas, each of which contains 4 rhymed couplets of iambic pentameter. Its subject matter is the tranquility of

retirement from public life. Most critics associate the poem's content with Marvell's own retirement from his position as tutor to Mary Fairfax, whose father, Thomas, was a General inOliver Cromwell's army during the English Civil War.
In the first stanza, the speaker mentions three forms of public virtue associated with the emblem of a particular plant's leaves: the palm for military virtue, the oak for civic virtue, and the bay (or laurel) for poetic virtue. However, these symbols also suggest the limitations of the pursuits they signify, since the wreaths are only made of trimmings from the actual plants. Public life and devotion to virtue must come to an end one day. The speaker suggests that just as flowers and trees "do close / To weave the garlands of repose," so must individuals retreat from social obligation into retired contemplation.

The speaker goes on to praise the solitude and quiet of his retreat into the garden, believing that he was mistaken to have once sought "Fair Quiet' and "Innocence" among the "busy companies of men." He also associates his private retreat with a holy experience, stating that the "sacred plants" of quiet and innocence can only grow amongst the organic plants in the garden. In other words, the material surrounding of the garden makes room in the speaker's heart and mind for the cultivation of spiritual values, which life in society has forced him to disregard.

The speaker continues to develop his extended conceit of the garden's superior virtues, finding its "lovely green" more favorable than red and white which are the colors poets most often used in erotic poetry to describe the lips, teeth, face, and body of a beloved. Poets may carve the name of their beloved into trees, but the speaker finds such actions to be fruitless, because the each tree already contains a more beautiful imprint: a proper name. By using this image, Marvell refers to the Renaissance doctrine of *signaturarerum,* or "signature of all things", which held that God imprinted each entity he created with the sign of its proper name, and gave Adam the power to recognize these signs. The speaker thus imagines his

experience in the garden as a paradisal return to Adam's perfect knowledge of creation.

The speaker continues to praise the abundant fruits, vines, flowers, and grass in the garden, but at the end of stanza five, the speaker's image of this natural cornucopia abruptly shifts when he finds himself "Stumbling on melons" and "Insnared with flow'rs." He falls onto the grass, which suggests that the garden's private efflorescence has become too much for him to manage, as if it ahs overwhelmed his bodily senses. Hence, he retreats into his mind, where the powers of contemplation become a source of superior creativity. His mind is capable of making other worlds and "other seas" that transcend the limitations of physical embodiment, thereby "annihilating all that's made / To a green thought in a green shade." Since this new shade of green denotes the creative power of the intellect, it appears to surpass the "lovely green" plants and trees that the speaker mentioned earlier.

The speaker then presents an image of his soul detaching from his body, but remaining in the garden. It simply glides into the tree limbs like a bird, waving its wings to reflect the light of the sun until it is ready for its "longer flight." The image suggests that during the soul's time on Earth, it is possible for it to transcend some of the physical body's limitations, as we see in the speaker's previous contemplation of a "green thought in a green shade." Yet the soul cannot entirely detach from the physical world until the moment of bodily death, so for the time being it must remain perched upon the highest reaches that the garden allows. Thus, the poem's final stanza contains an extended metaphor comparing the garden to a private universe, containing its own "fragrant zodiac" of flowers and a cosmic timekeeper in the form of the bee, whose industrious labors mark the passage of the time.

A Dialogue between Soul and Body

SOUL
O who shall, from this dungeon, raise
A soul enslav'd so many ways?
With bolts of bones, that fetter'd stands
In feet, and manacled in hands;
Here blinded with an eye, and there
Deaf with the drumming of an ear;
A soul hung up, as 'twere, in chains
Of nerves, and arteries, and veins;
Tortur'd, besides each other part,
In a vain head, and double heart.

BODY
O who shall me deliver whole
From bonds of this tyrannic soul?
Which, stretch'd upright, impales me so
That mine own precipice I go;
And warms and moves this needless frame,
(A fever could but do the same)
And, wanting where its spite to try,
Has made me live to let me die.
A body that could never rest,
Since this ill spirit it possest.

SOUL
What magic could me thus confine
Within another's grief to pine?
Where whatsoever it complain,
I feel, that cannot feel, the pain;
And all my care itself employs;
That to preserve which me destroys;
Constrain'd not only to endure
Diseases, but, what's worse, the cure;

And ready oft the port to gain,
Am shipwreck'd into health again.

BODY
But physic yet could never reach
The maladies thou me dost teach;
Whom first the cramp of hope does tear,
And then the palsy shakes of fear;
The pestilence of love does heat,
Or hatred's hidden ulcer eat;
Joy's cheerful madness does perplex,
Or sorrow's other madness vex;
Which knowledge forces me to know,
And memory will not forego.
What but a soul could have the wit
To build me up for sin so fit?
So architects do square and hew
Green trees that in the forest grew.

Discussion of the Poem

The dialogue is a form of poetry which is not often used. However, Marvell did write several: *A Dialogue between the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure*; *Clorinda and Damon*; *Ametas and Thestylis* are other examples, the first like this one, a moral debate; the other two, pastoral poems with some religious significance. It is best to see this dialogue as being like a first class cricket match. Both sides get two innings, alternately. At the end, we have to declare the match drawn. Marvell, though clearly favouring the Soul, does not give either side the match-winning argument.

The soul opens the batting with a powerful complaint: it is not only being imprisoned in the body, but tortured by it. The image of the soul being imprisoned is typically Platonic. Its move is to escape through the death of the

body. Marvell plays with several parts of this extended conceit: ‘blinded with an Eye' makes a nice paradox. The organs of sense blind (and bind) the soul to heaven, keeping it bound to sense impressions. Blinding was a common form of torture, as was constant sound. The worst part is ‘a vain head', meaning stuffed with idle, fruitless thoughts, and a ‘double Heart', because divided.

The body is not too well pleased with this onslaught, and accuses the soul of driving it around, when all it wants is a quiet life. It even has to get up and walk upright! (‘mine own Precipice I go'). The soul makes it restless with its own restlessness. It feels possessed by ‘this ill spirit'.

The soul's response is to enlarge on the ‘double Heart'. It has its own grief through being trapped in the body and has to bear the body's grief as well. We might say in modern terms, the soul here is both the psychology and the spirituality of human existence: the psychology derives from the body; the spirituality, from its heavenly origins. Left to itself, it would escape the body by letting it die; but the body's concern is to keep itself alive, and the soul is forced to help it do that. Again, Marvell makes the most of this paradox in his imagery: ‘Shipwrackt into health again'; ‘whats worse, the cure'.

The body is allowed its second innings. It lists the psychological suffering the soul forces on it through hope, fear, love, hatred and so on. The list goes on through the whole stanza. It climaxes with the paradox:

What but a Soul could have the wit
To build me up for Sin so fit?

Only the soul has given it the consciousness of sin. Left to itself, it would live like the animals in instinctive, undifferentiated being. The final image is one that Marvell was to take up several times in his ‘Mower' poems: the body is like an undifferentiated tree growing naturally; the soul like an architect (or topiary

gardener, as we might say), which trims and prunes it into all kinds of outlandish and unnatural shapes.

'A Dialogue between the Soul and Body' by Andrew Marvell contains several themes. The eternal conflict between the soul and body is the major theme of the poem. Several religious scriptures talk about this theme in detail. In this poem, Andrew Marvell provides a Christian perspective, and innovatively presents the paradox in his poem. It is true that in this world, they cannot exist without each other.

But sometimes for the passion of the soul, the body suffers. In some instances, the body's sinful activities pain the soul deeply. This conflict goes on until a person takes control and pacifies both of them.

There is another important theme of suffering in the poem. The poet divides it into two parts. One is spiritual suffering and another is bodily suffering. Spiritual suffering is different from the sensory. But, they are connected. As the soul lives inside the body, one's misdoings will affect the other. Only the spirit of salvation from the Christian perspective or the practice of meditation and self-awareness can save the body as well as the soul from this lifelong suffering. Otherwise, both of them remain in this chain of suffering until the body dies or the soul leaves for its destination.

The poem, *A Dialogue Between the Soul and Body* by Andrew Marvell contains vivid and concrete imagery and makes use of a number of conceits of the metaphysical kind. In fact, the very basis of the poem is the metaphysical kind.

In fact, the very basis of the poem is the metaphysical concept that the Soul and the Body are separate entities. The Body feeling itself to be a victim of the Soul's

tyranny, and the Soul believing itself to be a prisoner inside the Body are metaphysical conceits.

In the opening speech, we have a graphic picture of a prisoner being held in chains and fetters, and about to be hanged on the gallows. In the second speech, we have a vivid picture of the Body going about like a walking precipice.

In the third stanza, we have a vivid picture of a ship nearing its destination but getting wrecked just when it is close to the harbor. In the final speech we have a series of vivid pictures describing the physical manifestations of the emotions experienced by the Soul.
