

This poem was written around 1650, before Marvell started work as a tutor at Nun Appleton House for Thomas Fairfax. Fairfax had previously been Commander in Chief of the English army but resigned his post as a matter of principle; he did not accept the legitimacy of the proposed invasion of Scotland without provocation. Oliver Cromwell, on his return from Ireland, was appointed his successor.

The title outlines the subject matter of the poem - historical figures and comment on an historical occasion. Marvell writes with detachment, analysing the political figures and events of his time.

As a constitutional monarchist, Marvell could be expected to reject what Cromwell represented, but the poem suggests he feels Cromwell was fated for his position. H. M. Margoliouth describes the poem as having a 'transitional character... where royalist principles and admiration for Cromwell the Great Man exist side by side'.

Marvell would have been very familiar with Horace's style and concerns as his poems were taught in the original Latin in every school in England during the 17th and 18th centuries.

The critic A. Alvarez sees the essential quality of the poem as: 'judgment... which presents, balances and evaluates a whole situation, seeing all the implications and never attempting to simplify them.'

Horace: A Roman poet of the first century B.C. who celebrated the restoration of order after civil wars in Rome. In particular, he acclaimed the military achievements of Emperor Augustus.

Ode: A lyric poem of tranquil and meditative tone, repeating a single stanza form throughout.

An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland

<p>1 THE forward youth that would appear Must now forsake his Muses dear, Nor in the shadows sing His numbers languishing.</p>	<p>Suggests the arts of war are nobler than the arts of peace. Helps give a Roman flavour.</p>
<p>2 'Tis time to leave the books in dust, And oil the unused armour's rust, Removing from the wall The corslet of the hall.</p>	<p>A contrast as created, as men move from peace to war, leaving different aspects of life to be neglected.</p>
<p>3 So restless Cromwell could not cease In the inglorious arts of peace, But through adventurous war Urged his active star:</p>	<p>Adjectives give weight to ironic view and sense of fate – Cromwell as a man of destiny.</p>
<p>4 And the three-fork'd lightning, first Breaking the clouds where it was nurst, Did thorough his own side His fiery way divide:</p>	<p>Imagery of power and destruction links Cromwell with Jove, suggesting his force in dealing with the parliamentary army.</p>
<p>5 For 'tis all one to courage high, The emulous, or enemy; And with such, to enclose Is more than to oppose.</p>	<p>Positive virtues of Cromwell are seen, along with the need for action rather than debate.</p>
<p>6 The burning through the air he went And palaces and temples rent; And Caesar's head at last Did through his laurels blast.</p>	<p>Continuing the lightning imagery, Cromwell's power is stressed. The Romans believed the laurel protected the wearer from being struck. This refers to the death of Charles I, with 'Caesar' as a symbol of the King.</p>
<p>7 'Tis madness to resist or blame The face of angry Heaven's flame; And if we would speak true Much to the man is due,</p>	<p>Does this suggest God approved of Cromwell's actions? Or did he just claim this was so? Grudging admiration from the poet?</p>
<p>8 Who, from his private gardens, where He lived reserved and austere (As if his highest plot To plant the bergamot),</p>	<p>The Romans valued civic virtue and peace. Does this suggest some conflict in Cromwell? Compare with the symbolism of gardens in other poems. 'Plot' can suggest both the garden and political strategy.</p>

Annotated version of 'An Horatian Ode' by Andrew Marvell

<p>9 Could by industrious valour climb To ruin the great work of time And cast the Kingdoms old Into another mould;</p>	<p>Military language is taken from the Roman model. Is there disapproval from Marvell in the way he describes the change from monarchy to rule by parliament alone?</p>
<p>10 Though Justice against Fate complain, And plead the ancient rights in vain – But those do hold or break As men are strong or weak –</p>	<p>Balance of Charles I (Justice and the Divine Right of Kings / weak) against Cromwell (Fate and Strength)</p>
<p>11 Nature that hateth emptiness, Allows of penetration less, And therefore must make room Where greater spirits come.</p>	<p>Typical metaphysical scientific imagery, drawing on the concept that nature abhors a vacuum, and that two things cannot occupy the same space. By implication, there was no room for both Charles I and Cromwell in politics.</p>
<p>12 What field of all the civil war Where his were not the deepest scar? And Hampton shows what part He had of wiser art;</p>	<p>Cromwell was wounded at the Battle of Marston Moor, shows key role he played in the war. Hampton was a key figure in the Civil War; an MP jailed for refusing to pay Ship Money, Charles' levy to evade laws on tax raising.</p>
<p>13 Where, twining subtle fears with hope, He wove a net of such a scope That Charles himself might chase To Caresbrook's narrow case;</p>	<p>This refers to a (probably fictional) plot to allow Charles to escape to this castle, thus allowing Cromwell to take over. Note the choice of imagery.</p>
<p>14 That thence the Royal actor borne The tragic scaffold might adorn: While round the armed bands Did clap their bloody hands.</p>	<p>Marvell balances the views of both sides, showing the tragedy of the outcome. Is the presentation of the army sympathetic?</p>
<p>15 He nothing common did or mean Upon that memorable scene, But with his keener eye The axe's edge did try;</p>	<p>Emphasises the King's dignity at execution – ironic contrast to the army and Cromwell in the previous stanza? Is the axe symbolic, referring to Charles' awareness of the state of the country?</p>
<p>16 Nor call'd the gods, with vulgar spite, To vindicate his helpless right; But bow'd his comely head Down, as upon a bed.</p>	<p>Pity is roused for the King through the choice of dignified language and his acceptance of fate.</p>
<p>17 This was the memorable hour Which first assured the forced power: So when they did design The Capitol's first line,</p>	<p>Implication of might rather than right? The Capitol was the prime building in ruling the Roman Republic.</p>

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18

A **Bleeding Head**, where they begun,
Did **fright the architects** to run;
And yet in that the State
Foresaw its **happy fate!**

The architects building Jupiter's temple were told by an Etruscan¹ seer that this was a good omen. It suggests the New Republic can be positive, born out of a prophetic vision.

19

And now the **Irish** are ashamed
To see themselves **in one year tamed:**
So much one man can do
That does both **act** and **know**

A change of pace: clear praise of Cromwell's speed in subduing the Irish. An example of encomium.²

20

They can affirm his praises best,
And have, **though overcome**, confest
How **good** he is, how just
And fit for **highest trust**.

An ironic stanza in view of the massacres allowed in Ireland, but the terms are essential for the tone of this section and style of the Ode.

21

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

Cromwell not changed by his responsibilities, unusual as many men are corrupted by power. His qualities also fit him for leadership.

22

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:**

Clear submission to Parliament, not trying to act like a King. Cromwell is shown as modest, giving all glory to the new Republic.

23

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

Suggests grace in the way Cromwell defers to the Republic, yet the image of controlled power is key to our understanding of his character.

24

She, **having kill'd**, no more doth search
But on the **next green bough** to perch;
Where, when he first does lure,
The **falconer has her** sure.

Places power in the hands of the people for the good of the nation, not his own glory. No unnecessary killing takes place after the Civil War.

25

What may not then **our Isle** presume
While **victory** his crest does plume?
What may not others fear,
If thus he crowns each year?

The use of rhetorical questions drives forward his claims to greatness. The 'others' is a reference to the Scots.

26

As **Caesar** he, ere long, to Gaul,
To Italy an **Hannibal**,
And to all States not free
Shall **climacteric**³ be.

A clear parallel is made between Cromwell and great leaders of the classical world. He represents a critical point of change for all states who wish to be freed from rule by monarchy.

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27

The **Pict**⁴ no shelter now shall find
Within his **particolour**'d mind,
But, from this **valour**, sad
Shrink underneath the plaid;

The Scots are portrayed as barbaric with painted skins and an untrustworthy approach to peace. Cromwell is represented by his virtue and valour.

28

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

This continues the hunting imagery from stanzas 23/24. It emphasises the cunning of an unsophisticated people, hunted like animals.

29

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

Cromwell seen as vigilant and disciplined, urged not to reduce his efforts even if Scotland seems weak.

30

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

The spirits are those of King Charles and Cromwell's enemies. The reference to military arts brings the poem full circle and is a gentle reminder that holding the position needs as much skill as the gaining of it required. Suggests that the new English Republic may rival the old Roman one at its height.

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- 1 Refers to the area of Italy and Corsica that the ancient Romans called Etrusci or Tusci.
 - 2 A Latin word derived from the Greek (*encomion*) meaning the praise of a person or thing.
 - 3 In ancient Greek philosophy and astrology, the climacterics were critical years in a person's life, marking turning points.
 - 4 The Picts were a group of tribes in what is now central and northern Scotland. The name is derived from the Latin *pingere* meaning paint, and is probably a reference to painted or tattooed people.