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## **THOUGHTS IN A GARDEN: Critical Appreciation**



**ANDREW MARVELL**

### **Introduction**

One of the major English poets of the 17th century, **Andrew Marvell** (1621 –1678) was known for his passionate, sensuous and elegant lyrics. The proof of his greatness as a poet lies in the fact that his works continue to be praised and admired even in the contemporary period. He was deeply influenced by John Donne and the metaphysical school, yet his works also display the characteristic elegance of the cavalier school.

Thus, Andrew Marvell can be called an important transitional figure whose works effortlessly bridged the metaphysical school and the cavalier school. He was a protégé and friend of John Milton, and like him, wrote several poems dedicated to contemporary political issues; in fact, many postmodern theorists have focused on Marvell as a political writer. Marvell was also a politician who served as a member of the House of Commons. As a poet, he began writing at a young age though his initial poems that were published, while he was still in college, were in Greek and Latin. It is ironical that much of his sarcastic political satires were not published during his lifetime, and he became recognized as a major poet only after his death. The life of this enigmatic poet has always fascinated historians due to the scarcity of information about his personal life.

### **Works**

His poems range from the love-song "To His Coy Mistress", to evocations of an aristocratic country house and garden in "Upon Appleton House" and "The Garden", the political address "An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland", and the later personal and political satires "Flecknoe" and "The Character of Holland".

### **Summary**

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. A life of action, on the other hand, is futile, and men make a mistake in spending their time in feverish endeavors in order to win honors in different fields of life.

The poet says how futile are the endeavors of men by means of which they simply go crazy in order to win a crown of the leaves of a palm-tree or an oak-tree or a laurel tree for their military, or civic, or poetic achievements. They perform unceasing labors in order to obtain a crown of leaves from a single tree or herb. The short and ever-narrowing shades of these trees wisely rebuke such men for their hard labors; while all flowers and all trees act unitedly to weave garlands with their shades, these garlands being the garlands of rest and tranquility and therefore far superior to the garlands or crowns of leaves which those men seek.

In the next stanza, the poet addresses Quiet and says that Fair Quiet, I have found you here in this garden; and I have found here your dear sister, Innocence, also. For a long time, I made the mistake of seeking you both in the company of busy men. But, if at all your sacred plants grow here on the earth, they grow only among the plants of a garden and not in places crowded with human beings. The company of human

beings is nothing but barbarous as compared with this enjoyable solitude in the garden.

The poet says that neither the whiteness of the complexion nor the redness of the lips of ladies has ever been known to be so loving as the lovely green color of the plants and leaves in a garden. Doting lovers, who are as cruel in their actions as the flame of love which torments them, show their cruelty by carving the names of their sweethearts with knives on the barks of trees. It is regrettable that either these lovers are not quite aware of, or they do not pay enough attention to, the fact that the beauties of a garden are far more attractive than the beauties of their ladies. So far as I am concerned, O fair trees, wherever I happen to make use of a knife to cut into your barks, I shall carve no woman's name there but only your own names.

Next, the poet says that when our love has run its course, and our passion has been exhausted, we can withdraw into a garden for rest and refreshment. Or, when Cupid, the god of love, is not actively at work to people fall in love, he withdraws into a garden for relaxation. The gods who run after earthly women, whom they think beautiful, find that their chase has ended in their getting hold of trees instead of women. For instance, god Apollo ran after the nymph, Daphne, not in order that he should hold the laurel tree into which Daphne was to be transferred. Similarly, god Pan hotly pursued the nymph Syrinx not in order to satisfy his lust but because he wanted to get hold of a reed into which that nymph was to be metamorphosed.

Enjoying the natural abundance the poet exclaims that what a wonderful time I am having in this garden! Ripe apples hang downwards from the trees so as to touch my head. The delicious bunches of grapes growing on the vines come into such close contact with my lips, I walk, that their juice enters my mouth. The nectarines and the exquisitely-formed peaches come into my hands of their own accord, without my making any effort whatsoever. The melons grow on the ground in such plenty that, as I walk on, my feet strike against them and my walking is obstructed; and, entangled among the flowers, I fall down on the grass.

In the next stanza, the poet says that while my body remains on the grass, my mind withdraws itself from the body because it is not interested in the lesser or inferior pleasures offered by the fruits. My mind seeks the happiness of a different kind which originates from the mind itself. The mind is like an ocean where each creature living on the land has a counterpart in water. However, the mind can also create altogether different lands and different oceans which quite surpass the real lands and real oceans. The mind reduces everything that has been created to nothingness, giving rise

to fresh and vigorous thoughts in the shade of a green tree.

The poet then turns into a reflective mood and says that here, close to fountains, where my feet slip on account of the wetness of the ground, or, close to some fruit trees the lower parts of the trunks of which are covered with moss, my Soul discards the outer garment of the body and goes noiselessly into the branches of the trees. There, on the branches, my Soul sits like a bird and sings; then my Soul preens and combs its bright wings as a bird does; and finally, having prepared itself for a longer flight waves the manifold light in its wings.

The poet ponders that here I find myself in the same happy state in which Adam was when in the Garden of Eden he walked alone, without a companion. When he found himself in such a pure and sweet place, no comparison could have been appropriate for him. Or, finding himself in such a pure and sweet place as the Garden of Eden, Adam could not have wished for any companion, and no companion could have suited him. But it was not the happy lot of a mortal to be allowed to roam about along in that place. Had he continued to live alone in the Gardens of Eden, he would have enjoyed the happiness of two Paradises – one, the Paradise which was the Garden of Eden, and second, the Paradise of being alone.

In the last stanza poet talks about the creations of God and can't hide his awestruck response. He wonders how skillful was the gardener who made the flowers and plants grow here in such a manner and according to such a pattern that they collectively serve as a sun-dial. The rays of the sun fall on this sun-dial with diminished heat after passing through the green leaves which may be compared to the Signs of the Zodiac—Zodiac is the name given to that belt of the heavens, which includes all the apparent positions of the sun and planets. And the hard-working bee, while at work, is able to calculate the passing of time as correctly as we human beings can, by consulting this sundial. After all, how the passing of such sweet and refreshing hours could be calculated in the garden except by means of the sun-dial formed by plants and flowers.

### **Critical Analysis**

The Garden by Andrew Marvell is a unique poem which is romantic in its expression, metaphysical in its word-game, and classical in its music.

It is romantic because it is about the nature in subject and theme, and it is the expression of the poet's personal and emotional feelings about life in the nature (and society).

Its style is metaphysical because it uses the conceit, forceful argument, allusions (references) from sources like the Bible, myths and metaphysical philosophies.

And it is a classical poem in its form because the stanzas, rhythm, rhyme and word-choice is like in classical poetry (carefully perfected form, and a language different from the ordinary).

The theme is that the garden (which is the symbol of life in nature) is the perfect place for physical, mental and spiritual comfort and satisfaction, unlike the society where pleasure is false and temporary.

The poet has finally found the nature and realized its value; he claims that the nature is the only true place for complete luxury. 'The Garden' is a unique metaphysical poem which is Romantic in its subject matter and also contains classical elements in its diction, meter and structure. The poem is written in heroic couplet, which deals with the poet's experience of feelings and ideas about the garden that represents the nature. The poet begins by comparing the nature with society and social life and criticizing the society and 'busy' worldly life.

### **Style and Structure**

The meter Marvell uses in The Garden is Marvell's favourite, the iambic tetrameter arranged as couplets. Here the couplets sit in octaves, but typically the couplets carry the units of sense, whilst the stanzas act as paragraphs. It is a very ordered verse, and reinforces the sense of order within the garden and in Marvell's life itself. It must be one of the most perfectly controlled and ordered poems in the English language.

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