

# A Critical Analysis of Andrew Marvell's – 'Thoughts in a Garden'.

**Andrew Marvell** is surely the single most compelling embodiment of the change that came over English society and letters in the course of the 17th century. In an era that makes a better claim than most upon the familiar term transitional, Marvell wrote a varied array of exquisite lyrics that blend Cavalier grace with Metaphysical wit and complexity. He first turned into a panegyrist for the Lord Protector and his regime and then into an increasingly bitter satirist and polemicist, attacking the royal court and the established church in both prose and verse.

The refreshing and stimulating effect of nature is all-encompassing. In '**Thoughts in a Garden**', the speaker realizes the importance of isolating one's self from the societal distraction, to the safety of nature. The poem comprises of nine eight-line stanzas, each of which contains four rhymed couplets of iambic pentameter where the poet compares life in two contexts, society, and nature. Metaphysical philosophies drawn from the bible as well as real life allegories punctuate the poem. The structure fortifies the poem's overall theme. To the speaker 'The Garden' transcends physical manifestation as it can occur in the mind. The poem celebrates a contemplative life away from worldly cares by retreating into the sanctuary of solitude, 'Thoughts in a Garden', and its superiority to social 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 in Oliver Cromwell's army during the English Civil War.

*How vainly men themselves amaze  
To win the palm, the oak, or bays;  
And their uncessant labors see  
Crowned from some single herb or tree,*

The poem highlights the futility of ambitious pursuits and their corresponding achievements in society relative to the nurturing effect of nature. Akin to the plants, ideas require a conducive environment to flourish. The speaker criticizes the people proud of putting a garland of few leaves as the ultimate reward for their endless labors. In this first stanza, he highlights the limitations of excelling in single endeavor represented by wreaths related to poetic (bay), military (palm),

and civic (oak) achievements. 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. Human effort demands recognition but results in acquisition of 'narrow verged shade' at best. The company of human beings is nothing but barbarous as compared with this enjoyable solitude in the garden. The garland of repose manifests true and holistic pleasure.

*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.*

In the third stanza, he depicts nature as the epitome of beauty criticizing lovers' practices of curving their names into trees. His sensuous description of physical arousal in the fifth stanza validates the above sexual implications of nature. The serenity of 'The Garden' complete with its green lushness supersedes the red and white utilized in erotic poetry. It follows that when the passion that fuels love in youth declines, people and love itself escapes to the security of nature. The mind creates a fictitious garden to escape societal pressures. The speaker's physical limitations necessitate escape to the mental realm. Wherever this garden is, the speaker is clearly pumped up about the idea of spending lots of time there. There's lots of delicious fruit, so many melons that you can't even find room to walk, and nice cushy grass to fall on. Withdrawing into retirement implies advancement in age and the corresponding frailty of the body.

In the sixth stanza, the speaker retires to his mental garden implying that one can create his or her own paradise for spiritual release. Unlike sensory data, physical garden, the world of ideas occupies infinity. The comparison of the mind to an ocean validates this line of thought. The poet equates the power to shape one's imagination to the truth that the Garden possesses. In this fictitious garden, the soul finds spiritual tranquillity. The poem takes a metaphysical turn with the garden' acting as the reincarnation of the biblical Eden. It imbues him with the wisdom of nature Adam possessed. The allusion of the peaceful coexistence of Adam with nature devoid of evil reiterates the theme of withdrawal. And just in

case anyone remains unconvinced, the speaker calls in some Greek mythology for backup—even classical gods like Apollo and Pan, he says, liked plants better than people.

The speaker highlights the superior attributes of meditation and nature relative to life in the public domain. Nature provides a platform for growth. The tranquility of nature dwarfs human pursuits of recognition and successes. 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. 'Thoughts in a Garden' qualifies as a metaphysical poem in light of the diversity of themes and the subsequent use of nature to align them. Natural splendour outlives and overshadows artificial beauty.

*And, as it works, th' industrious bee  
Computes its time as well as we.  
How could such sweet and wholesome hours  
Be reckoned but with herbs and flow'rs!*

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. The only industry in this garden of meditation and reflection, however, is that of the bee, which, unlike the busy humans of the opening sections, moves with the rhythms of nature.

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