

Lecture 23: Andrew Marvell's Gardens

Eternal Spring — as in Boticelli's *Primavera*

THREE POEMS LINKED BY THE ARCHETYPE OF THE GARDEN

Begin with some lines from a poem about the New World, “Bermudas” (B1698-99), that resonates with Boticelli's painting and echoes the poem called “The Garden.”

He gave us **this eternal spring**,
Which here enamels every thing,
And sends the fowls to us in care, 15
On daily visits through the air;
He hangs in shades the orange bright,
Like golden lamps in a green night,
And does in the pomegranates close
Jewels more rich than Ormus shows; 20
He makes the figs our mouths to meet,
And throws the melons at our feet.

The Garden is (like the New World of the Imagination,
“such as Nature never brought forth”) an archetype of . . .
What?

I. The first poem **juxtaposes the Garden with a Desert**: a famous seduction poem (*carpe diem* = ‘seize the day’), achieves much of its force by contrasting the erotic lushness of a garden with a wasteland. Standing “behind” the poem is a female image of the *hortus conclusus*: “A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed” (Song of Songs 4:12). This enticing image is idealized but (therefore) not realized; it is contrasted with an image of the world (whether actual or imagined) as a *real* desert.

To his Coy Mistress

(B 1703-04)

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love’s day;
Thou by the Indian Ganges’ side
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood;
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My **vegetable love** should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should go to praise

5

10

Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast, 15
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your **heart**.
For, lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate. 20

How do you read lines 17-18? What parts are those?
What is a heart?

But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found, 25
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
That long preserv'd virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust. 30
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none I think do there embrace.

Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires 35
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may;
And **now**, like am'rous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour,
Than languish in his slow-chapp'd power. 40
Let us roll all our strength, and all
Our sweetness, up into one ball;
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough the iron gates of life.
Thus, though we cannot make our sun 45
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

II. The Mind as its Own Place—a garden where “the Lord God [made] to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge” (Genesis 2:9).

This recreational poem elaborates an erotic metaphor of the woman's body in order to transcend it— maybe. Whereas “Coy Mistress” communicates a sense of urgency, “The Garden” relaxes into an ecstasy; the poet is (as we say) “blissed out” and recreated.

The Garden

(B 1710-12)

I

How vainly men themselves amaze
To win the Palm, the Oke, or Bayes;
And their uncessant Labours see
Crown'd from some single Herb or Tree,
Whose short and narrow verged shade 5
Does prudently their Toyles upbraid;
While all Flow'rs and all Trees do close
To weave the Garlands of repose.

II

Fair quiet, have I found thee here,
And Innocence thy Sister dear! 10
Mistaken long, I sought you then
In busie Companies of Men.
Your sacred Plants, if here below,
Only among the Plants will grow.
Society is all but rude 15
To this delicious Solitude.

III

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. 20
Little, alas, they know or heed,
How far these Beauties Hers exceed.
Fair Trees! were soe'er your barks I wound,
No Name shall but your own be found.

IV

When we have run our Passions heat, 25
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. 30
And Pan did after Syrinx speed,
Not as a Nymph, but for a Reed.

V

What wond'rous Life in this I lead!
Ripe Apples drop about my head;
The Luscious Clusters of the Vine 35
Upon my Mouth do crush their Wine;
The Nectaren, and curious Peach,
Into my hands themselves do reach;
Stumbling on Melons, as I pass,
Insar'd with Flow'rs, I fall on Grass. 40

VI

Mean while the Mind, from Pleasure less,
Withdraws into its happiness:
The Mind, that Ocean where each kind
Does streight its own resemblance find;
Yet it creates, transcending these, 45
Far other Worlds, and other Seas,
Annihilating all that's made
To a green Thought in a green Shade.

How do you interpret *from Pleasure less*?
What (or who) do those *other Worlds* and *other Seas*
remind you of?

VII

Here at the Fountains sliding foot,
Or at some Fruit-trees mossy root, 50
Casting the Bodies 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, 55
Waves in its Plumes the various Light.

VIII

Such was that happy Garden-state,
While Man there walk'd without a Mate:
After a Place so pure, so sweet,
What other Help could yet be meet! 60
But 'twas beyond a Mortal's share
To wander solitary there:
Two Paradises 'twere in one
To live in Paradise alone.

Was it good for the man to be alone?

IX

How well the skillful Gardner drew 65
Of flow'rs and herbes 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. 70
How could such sweet and wholesome Hours
Be recokon'd but with herbs and flow'rs!

Marvell wrote a number of other garden poems; several of them are in your anthology. (@ B 1706-10; see also “Upon Appleton House,” 1726-36) But one of his best is not in your anthology. Actually, it’s not a garden poem either. But it’s about the most famous garden poem of all:

III. On Mr. Milton’s *Paradise Lost*

When I beheld the Poet blind, yet bold,
In slender Book his vast Design unfold—
Messiah Crown’d, *Gods* Reconcil’d Decree,
Rebelling *Angels*, the Forbidden Tree,
Heav’n, Hell, Earth, Chaos, All—the Argument 5
Held me a while misdoubting his Intent,
That he would ruine (for I saw him strong)
The sacred Truths to Fable and old Song,
(So *Sampson* groap’d the Temples Posts in spight)
The World o’rwhelming to revenge his Sight. 10

Yet as I read, soon growing less severe,
I liked his Project, the success did fear;
Through that wide Field how he his way should find
O’re which lame Faith leads Understanding blind;
Lest he perplex the things he would explain, 15
And what was easie he should render vain.

Or if a Work so infinite he spann'd,
Jealous I was that some less skilful hand
(Such as disquiet alwayes what is well,
And by ill imitating would excell) 20
Might hence presume the whole Creations day
To change in Scenes, and show it in a Play.

Pardon me, *Mighty Poet*, nor despise
My causeless, yet not impious, surmise.
But I am now convinc'd, and none will dare 25
Within thy Labours to pretend a Share.
Thou hast not miss'd one thought that could be fit,
And all that was improper dost omit:
So that no room is here for Writers left,
But to detect their Ignorance or Theft. 30

The Majesty which through thy Work doth Reign
Draws the Devout, deterring the Profane
And things divine thou treat'st of in such state
As them preserves, and Thee inviolate.
At once delight and horreur on us seize, 35
Thou singst with so much gravity and ease;
And above humane flight dost soar aloft,
With Plume so strong, so equal, and so soft.
The *Bird* nam'd from that *Paradise* you sing
So never Flags, but alwaies keeps on Wing. 40

Where couldst thou Words of such a compass find?
Whence furnish such a vast expense of Mind?
Just Heav'n Thee, like *Tiresias*, to requite,
Rewards with *Prophecie* thy loss of Sight.

Well might thou scorn thy Readers to allure 45
With tinkling Rhime, of thy own Sense secure;
While the *Town-Bays* writes all the while and spells,
And like a Pack-Horse tires without his Bells.
Their Fancies like our bushy Points appear,
The Poets tag them; we for fashion wear. 50
I too transported by the *Mode* offend,
And while I meant to *Praise* thee, must Commend.
Thy verse created like thy *Theme* sublime,
In Number, Weight, and Measure, needs not *Rhime*.