A WALK THROUGH ANDREW MARVELL'S GARDEN

A Lecture

by

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A WALK THROUGH ANDREW MARVELL'S GARDEN

I was introduced to Mr Andrew Marvell and taken to visit his Garden for the first time many years ago by one of my tutors who became my good friend. He was William Gorman. I was a freshman at St John's, very green and quite intoxicated by English poetry, which I was just discovering. Mr Gorman taught me that there were ways to go about understanding what I already knew I loved. I should like here and now to acknowledge my great and longstanding debt of gratitude to him for this.

Once in a conversation with Mr Gorman about, I suppose, some tentatively offered enthusiasm of my own -- Matthew Arnold, perhaps, or Robert Browning -- he asked me if I knew Andrew Marvell. I said I didn't. The fact was I'd never heard of him. He said, "You should." So I went home and read -- or tried to read -- some of Marvell's poems. I didn't understand them. By a normal mutation, I expressed this to myself as, "I don't like these."

Later, when Mr Gorman asked me what I though of the poems, I tried a more diplomatic formulation and said, "I don't really get them." He said, "Hmm." Then he added, generously, "I think you will, if you stay with them."

Since then, I have returned regularly in times of certain kinds of need to Mr Marvell's poems. And very often have I visited his Garden.

This evening I should like to take you there with me to meet Mr Marvell and to walk through his Garden . A sort of guided tour. Not that I think I understand everything that went into the planning and planting of it. But I have no intention of "explaining" The Garden. That isn't, after all, what one does with gardens (or with poems either, for that matter.) I have, however, paid many visits there over the years, and I have seen some things that you might not notice for yourselves right off on your first visit unless somebody points them out to you.

Of course, you may hate guided tours and people chattering at you. I do myself. But they do often save time. Besides, you can always come back later by yourself. Indeed, you should. For that is the whole point of gardens. (And of poetry, I might add.)

I should also tell you before we start that The Garden is much more extensive than it may seem at first glance. I myself have never managed to see all there is to it.

GARDENS

Before we go into The Garden I must prepare you a little in advance. We ought to think together about What a garden is at all? as the Irish would put it; and about what sort of garden Mr Marvell had in mind when he made his. For there are many kinds of gardens. We have flower gardens and kitchen gardens, truck gardens, botanical gardens, zoological gardens and even kindergartens.

But Mr Marvell was thinking of the kind of garden that in his world -- which is to say England in the 17th century -- was made to perfect a palace or a great country house. Francis Bacon in his essay, Of Gardens writes this:

> God Almighty first planted a Garden. And it is the purest of human pleasures. It is the greatest refreshment to the spirits of man; without which buildings and palaces are but gross handyworks; and a man shall ever see that when ages grow to civility and elegancy, men come to build stately sooner than to garden finely; as if gardening were the greater perfection.

I shall come back to Bacon, but let me draw my point. The art of gardening -- of horticulture -- differs from farming -- agriculture -- as roses differ from turnips; as flowers differ from vegetables; as labor differs from leisure, as practice differs from contemplation; as work differs from pleasure. Now it is true that if there is to be a garden, work must be performed constantly; but such work is

performed for the sake of leisure. As Michelangelo labored mightily to paint the Sistine ceiling, even though his paintings are perfectly useless. They are good for nothing but to be looked at. Contemplated.

And so with gardens, though a garden differs from a painting in that to contemplate it you literally walk into it. But the garden, like the painting, has no use at all, except to be contemplated.

I would add another observation about gardens that may not be ordinarily thought of. We can classify the Fine Arts in two groups: (1) those which are realized in Space, as Painting, Sculpture and Architecture; and (2)those which are realized in Time, as Poetry, Drama, and Music. Now Gardening, which is usually taken to be an adjunct and a part of Architecture, cannot really be so. Gardening is essentially one of the arts of Time.

For a garden is composed of living plants which, whether they be trees or shrubs or herbs or the flowers of a day, exist, like ourselves, in Time. Each plant or tree or flower lives in a garden. Each is, so to speak, an actor who comes on stage to perform his solo part in the right season and in consort with other actors like himself. Each has his lifetime and his season.

Bacon puts it this way:

> I do hold that in the royal ordering of palaces there ought to be gardens for all the months in the year; in which severally things of beauty may be then in season.

I quote a little further to let you see what he has in mind:

> For December and January, and the latter part of November, you must take such things as are green all winter; Holly; ivy; bays; juniper; ...rosemary; lavender..

I have abridged this passage -- reluctantly -- for it has its own poetry, as all catalogues have that are composed

with the love of each item that is named. All good gardeners make their own lists for their own climates. The great seed houses mail out to us now in the dark time of the year their own catalogues, lavishly illustrated, to tempt us with visions of spring. Order now!

But my point here, which I do not want to lose, is that the fine art of gardening is one of the arts of Time; and that its time, unlike that of, say Music or Poetry, is the Time of the year itself, the Time of the Sun and the Seasons. It is the same Time which counts off the time of our lives. This is why the time in gardens is measured by sundials, which portray Time itself as "the moving shadow of Eternity." And, as Andrew Marvell will say, as "a fragrant Zodiack."

EDEN GARDEN

One more thing I must mention before I come to Mr Marvell's Garden. I mean, of course, the title. The title is, so to speak, the gate, the entrance-way. Titles of books and poems in general are meant somehow to get us into the work. They do this in various ways -- by naming the hero, as Tom Jones or Don Quixote or The Brothers Karamazov; the great central event or situation or problem, as The Book of Genesis, or the Iliad or War and Peace or In Search of Lost Time; and so on.

I have mentioned here great big poems -- or maybe I mean big great poems. But the same thing is true of little great poems: Upon Westminster Bridge, Ode on a Grecian Urn, The Windhover. Frequently the title alludes, either explicitly or obscurely, to one of our great myths. All of the works I have named explore or meditate some central mystery, because that is the nature of poetry itself. "Great myths answer many a mystery."

And so with Marvell's Garden. Anyone who has been raised even vaguely in Western culture, upon hearing the title, The Garden, without further context, surely thinks, "O, you mean that garden?" THE Garden, taken generally, is surely Eden Garden. Paradise.

I remind you of Bacon's first sentence, "God Almighty first planted a Garden." It is the place which God made for Adam (which is to say, Man) and which Man was made for. Likewise, it is the place that Adam lost for himself and for us all. Since that loss, we have been permanent exiles. So goes the myth, speaking to the universal feeling of "homesickness for ...another and different world."

Eden would be, if there were such a place, the most sacred place of any on Earth. I mean by a sacred place, a place on earth in which an encounter has taken place between God and Man. Many places are thought to be sacred, but Eden as the first shining place, would be the most sacred of all.

And even if there is no such geographical place, that place nevertheless dwells in the memory of everyone living. It is a kind of innate memory in our imagination. It is the land of our heart's desire. This universal memory almost assures us of its real existence by a kind of implication that is something like Anselm's ontological argument. And, although this argument may be more dependent upon the Memory and the Imagination and the Heart than upon the Intellect, we may find it the more persuasive for that very reason.

Every garden is made in the image of Eden and every garden remembers Eden. It is, thus, a most powerful image, and the invocation of it produces a host of associations. It is the place where we were innocent, free of toil, at one with -- not at odds with -- Nature. A kind of life that we can scarcely imagine except by such negatives as I have just used.

According to the myth, when we lost Eden, we had to live by the sweat of our brow. Yet sometimes we labor in order to have leisure. And, strangely, we toil in our gardens to enjoy the image of Eden, to realize that memory.

One more thing I would say about gardens. They are places of solitude. Places for solitude. Solitude is not in good repute these days, but it is a deep human requirement. It is being alone, but it is not loneliness. Loneliness is an

intense craving for the society of others. Solitude is being alone for thought, or prayer or as Bacon put it, for refreshment of the human spirit.

TOPOGRAPHY

Suppose we begin with the ground plan of The Garden. You can see on your sheets that it is laid out with formal elegance, in nine eight-line stanzas which are end-rhymed in couplets. The meter throughout is iambic tetrameter, a hard meter to handle, but don't worry -- Mr Marvell handles it as well as any English poet ever did.

As I read the poem, it has three principal parts. These are not indicated on your sheets. This is a greater matter than the stanzas, and Mr Marvell has left it up to the reader to discover them for himself. As a tour-guide, however, I must try to say something helpful, so I propose that the first four stanzas comprise the opening movement, the next three the middle movement; and the last two the final movement.

By speaking of "movements" I have slipped into a musical analogy here, first of all because the distinctions are heard in the music of the words; second, because the development of the poem seems to me to be quite like that of a concerto -- say of certain Mozart piano concertos; and finally, because, as I have already said, I think that gardening itself, like music, is an art of disposing its own kind of events in time.

The First Movement seems to me to be a fast, brilliant, witty and complex sonata-allegro with two subjects and ending in a return to its beginning. It is evidently in major. The Second Movement is the slow movement, an Andante, I think, and also in major. It is constructed linearly in three parts. The Third Movement has two sections, beginning in minor and changing to the parallel major. The tempos are moderate.

SCENARIO

The tripartite structure suggests that the action of the

poem will have a beginning, middle and end. I shall try to show how the action of the poem works itself out in these three movements. I say action because like most good lyrics poems, this one is a drama in small.

A scenario of the poem would go something like this: The Poet, work-weary and world-weary, his forces scattered, makes a retreat into a great garden to escape from Society and to refresh his spirits in solitude. As he reflects upon the world he has left and responds to the one he has entered, he undergoes a mystical experience in which he transcends this garden and seems to find himself alone in that other garden that is out of Time and Place and to experience that first state that Adam knew. Then, the vision fading, he finds himself back once more in the garden in England in the 17th century. We are given no account of either translation. I suspect that the Poet himself could not give an account. I think it could not have been through any effort of his own or of any other human agency. Perhaps the Garden did it.

The movements then are: (1) Out of the world and into the Garden; (2) Out of the Garden and into THE GARDEN; (3) Back into the Garden and, by implication, back into the world.

"The Garden"

Let me now read The Garden. In doing so, I am heeding Mr Gorman's dictum that, "a poem exists only in the sounding." For Poetry is one of the arts of Time, and its very nature is to be realized, if at all, only in the passing of time. To be understood, it must come to us by way of the voice and the ear. Properly speaking, Poetry does not exist on sheet of paper as a drawing does. So let me, as well as I can, try to find a voice and a music for The Garden.

The Garden

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
Does prudently their Toyles 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 busie 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! where s'eer your barkes I wound,
No Name shall but your own be found.

When we have run our Passions 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 Nectaren, and curious Peach,
Into my hands themselves do reach;
Stumbling on Melons, as I pass,
Insnar'd with Flow'rs, I fall on Grass.

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,
Far other Worlds, and other Seas;
Annihilating all that 's made
To a green Thought in a green Shade.

Here at the Fountains sliding foot,
Or at some Fruit-trees mossy root,
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,
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 skilful Gardner drew
Of flow'rs and herbes this Dial new;
Where from above the milder Sun
Does through a fragrant Zodiack run;
And, as it works, th' industrious Bee
Computes its time as well as we.
How could such sweet and wholsome Hours
Be reckon'd but with herbs and flow'rs!

FIRST MOVEMENT

I have already said that in terms of the "scenario" the First Movement is an entry into the garden, although we don't discover that until the second stanza with the words,

Fair Quiet, have I found thee here

At that moment we realize that the Poet has entered the garden and has been looking around at everything, sinking into the quiet and letting it sink into him. Throughout the movement, he is looking backward, viewing the "busie companies of Men" that he has just fled, and breathing deep sighs of relief. Neither he nor we know how he came to find himself in the garden.

This movement develops two themes, the vanity of worldly pursuits and the frustration of romantic pursuits.

A word about the style. It is brilliantly witty. Now wit in Mr Marvell's sense is out of fashion with our age which prefers a sequence of "one-liners" followed by guffaws. So a word about wit. It is "a tough reasonableness under a slight, lyric grace", to quote T.S Eliot. It requires thought. It works with imagination and turns on surprise and delight at the unexpected. Marvell, like Mozart, never goes where we expect him to go, but always surprises and delights us with something infinitely better than we could have thought of for ourselves.

This leaves me in an awkward spot. Explaining a joke is thankless enough -- no one ever laughs when you do. Pointing out the witty is probably even more useless. I shall do my best and try to be brief. For someone should point out these things -- it's what tour guides are for.

Stanza 1

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
Does prudently their Toyles upbraid;
While all Flow'rs and all Trees do close
To weave the Garlands of repose.

After reading the first stanza a few times it dawns on us that there is something odd about the diction. All the words are quite ordinary words that we all use, and all seem to be used with precision.(The tidy four-foot lines and the neat rhymes of the couplets lend to the effect of precision.) Yet we find ourselves wondering how to take some of the words. Consider.

How vainly men themselves amaze

Take "vainly." Does Marvell intend "to what little real purpose"? Or does he mean "with what absurd conceit"? Or again take "amaze". It can mean "to astonish", as it does for us; but in the 17th century it also meant "to perplex" of "to bewilder" or "to lead astray", as in a labyrinth or maze.

And finally, what about "themselves", the most ordinary word of the doubtful three. As you think about it in its context, you wonder, Is it a reflexive or a reciprocal pronoun? Do men amaze one another in their pursuit of fame -- as Achilles amazed Alexander and Alexander, Caesar? Or do they amaze themselves -- as in the case of the famous harpsichordist who, after hearing the tape of her most recent recording, exclaimed, "It is incredible how well I play!"

Now to write a line in which three out of the five first words are equivocal must mean either that the poet has no ear for language or else that he knows exactly what he is doing and intended everything -- that he is using the

equivocations brilliantly. We know intuitively that the latter is the case.

Twenty-seven differing meanings follow upon the possible combinations of these equivocations. And all are compatible. The Poet means all of them. You can work it out for yourselves at leisure -- it would be tedious to do here. But you don't really need to because you know intuitively that the line works. I can make an awkward paraphrase to illustrate thus:

> With what futility, or with what conceit, or with how much of both, men astonish, or bewilder, or both astonish and bewilder themselves or one another or both themselves and one another...etc.

If you did not see all of this intuitively, Marvell's line would have failed. But it does not fail. It succeeds brilliantly, effortlessly.

Clearly, then, we hare a masterful and witty poet to work with, a man of virtuosity and imagination. A poet who wants you to think, to be aware, and, as you can, to match his own wit and intelligence.

Of course the rest of the poem must be worthy of this beginning. This line is only an opening chord.

Stanza 1

The first stanza as a whole, like any good opening,is a statement in brief of the whole work. It moves from the busyness of the great world, the world of athletic, civic and poetic accomplishments, signified by crowns of Palm, Oke, or Bay leaves, to the crowns braided of all Trees and Flow'rs, which he calls "the Garlands of repose." The motion is from busyness and toil to peace and Quiet.

This is a serious piece of wisdom, but one which stated flatly would hardly attract your serious attention. However, without departing from the underlying wisdom, Marvell attracts us and delights us with his invention; which is that Men by toiling unceasingly, discover that their crownin reward is a stingy little wreath of leaves that doesn't even

give much shade -- which is exactly what anyone in the full glare of fame most desperately needs. If the hero's taste were more catholic, goes the argument, he could have cultivated for himself a more generous crown of all trees and flowers, and could be enjoying peace and quiet.

In line six there's a lovely pun. He rhymes

...narrow-vergèd shade" with

...prudently upbraid.

Upbraid, of course, means to reproach and criticize severely, but Marvell pretends -- and we delightedly go along with him -- that it also means to braid up into a crown. Thus the crown itself tells the hero while he's wearing it, that he has wasted his life's time on such nonsense.

There's also a learned joke, that I dare allude to, since you have all have read Herodotus. When Demaratus tells Xerxes that in the Greek games the prize is an crown of leaves, he cannot believe it. "Nothing more than that?", he says and wonders at the strange Greeks who are content with the honor of winning the contest and do not care about golden trophies. Marvell takes Xerxes' part in disparaging the frugal crown, but he gives it another turn by proposing that nicer leaves and flowers would be a far better reward.

Observe that Marvell has managed to say all of this in exactly 64 syllables, while I have plodded clumsily through more words than I care to count. Quickness and a flashing insight are the very nature of wit. (His, not mine.)

I promise now to move more rapidly -- this is, after all an allegro we're talking about -- through the rest of the movement, now that you've seen what sort of a Poet we're dealing with.

Stanza 2

Fair Quiet, have I found thee here,
And Innocence thy Sister dear!
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,
To this delicious Solitude.

This stanza picks up on the note of repose, the last word of the preceding stanza. The Poet confesses -- to himself, and to Quiet and Innocence whom he apostrophizes -- his hitherto inveterate error of seeking for the good life in worthy works among his fellow men. Now he professes to recognize that Quiet and Innocence dwell only in the precincts of the Garden, far from from human company.

The final couplet is again a splendid -- and courteous -- double entendre.

Society is all but rude
To this delicious Solitude.

At first, he seems to mean that Society is barely courteous to those who would desert her for solitude. (You recall Aristotle's remark in the Politics that one who lives to himself is either a beast or a god. And in practice society does feel uneasy with those who go apart. Such withdrawal seems a condemnation.)

I think that the lines mean "All Society is merely rude/(compared) To this delicious Solitude." Social condemnation of solitude is universal.
condemnation of solitude is universal.

And notice now the quality of the last line.

To this delicious Solitude.

It is impossible to articulate this line at all without almost tasting the words in the mouth. It is a taste of what is to come. For the real subject of the poem is Solitude.

Stanza 2 raises the question, Can that Innocence which

was lost in a garden, be regained? The answer is, If so, only in a garden.

Stanza 3

Stanza 3 shifts from the pursuit of fame to the pursuit of romantic love. If we flee Society, should we not, so to speak, consider sharing our Solitude with one other, with a beloved? This thought has, after all, occurred to others. "Come live with me and be my love/ And we will all the pleasures prove..." Alceste, who is not a true solitary,no matter what he thinks, offers to marry Célimène, if only she will go off with him alone and apart from the "busie companies of Men."

But this Poet has already decided against that. And for the astonishing reason that green of the trees is far more amorously engaging than rosy lips and cheeks.

No white nor red was ever seen
So am'rous as this lovely green.

What a surprise again is the first couplet! We have always known that white and red are love's colors. Red lips; rosy cheeks;"white-armed Andromache";"her neck is like the swan."

O the red rose breathes of passion
And the white rose breathes of love.

But Marvell sings,

No white nor red was ever seen
So am'rous as this lovely green.

He has already confessed to a love of gardens. Like most other people he loves Trees. But amorously? as he professes? The trees, he says, are more beautiful than any mistress. His wit verges towards extravagance.

We think of Orlando solitary, moaning and mooning about the Forest of Arden, carving Rosalind on the beech trees and hollies. And I suppose that Marvell would have us think in fun, of the love-sick Andrew mooning about the garden carving "Beech" and "Holly" in their barks. Of course

Orlando will pay no attention to him as Andrew urges that Holly is far more beautiful than Rosalind.

Green is a very good color, to be sure, and this is one of the greenest poems in English. For green is the color of Life, of living Nature. Here in "The Garden", under the greenwood tree, we've been dimly imagining green all along. Still, it's not a very good color for a girl. In Twelfth Night Viola tells the lovesick Duke of her pretended sister,

> She never told her love,
> But let concealment, like a worm in the bud
> Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought,
> And with a green and yellow melancholy,
> She sat like Patience on a monument,
> Smiling at grief.

You see, green both is and is not amorous. It's a very good color for a tree or an herb, but not so good for a mistress -- unless she be lovesick.

Stanza 4

Developing the theme of the pursuit of love, Stanza 4 concludes the First Movement with a bravura passage, by suggesting that when we have run our passion's race -- and presumably -- have lost it, the weary and chastened lover should make a retreat into the solitude of the Garden. He reminds us that the gods themselves did so, and cites two parallel examples from Ovid's Metamorphoses to make his point, namely the famous cases of Daphne and Apollo and of Syrinx and Pan.

Since we no longer read Ovid in the course of our program, it is possible that you don't know these stories. I shall condense them for you.

Each god had fallen in love with a mortal girl. Both girls were prudently reluctant to yield to the importunacy of their divine lovers. But occasions arose when each god, encountered his beloved alone in the forest. Each pursued her as hard as he could in a running race. And each god both lost and won his race. For as each was on the point of

overtaking the girl, she prayed the local water-nymphs to save her.

The nymphs responded in the only way they could and metamorphosed the girls beyond even the gods' powers. Daphne was transformed into a laurel tree just as the pursuing Apollo touched her shoulder. Syrinx, her flight impeded by a river, was changed into a clump of reeds growing on the bank.

Both gods, having run their "Passion's" heat made the best of the situation. Apollo, god of Poetry, vowed that henceforth the Laurel would be sacred to his arts, and that supreme Poets would be crowned with Laurel, that is, Bay leaves. Pan, god of all Nature, is also necessarily a musician; so that when Syrinx was metamorphosed into reeds, Pan, to solace himself, cut a bunch of them and sat down to make a panpipe -- still called a syrinx -- on which he mourns his lost love with those melancholy little tunes that you can hear, if you listen carefully, in any upland meadow where the wild goats graze.

This is a bravura ending to the First Movement. Notice those the two themes -- that of the pursuits of fame and of love -- have been brought together at the end. The Laurel crown has not only returned here, but has been <u>explained</u> by an origin myth. The pursuits of the divine passion began indeed amorously, but have in the end been univeralized in those leafy crowns which reward poetic or public virtue.

Best of all, those nymphs with their flashing white limbs, their rosy lips and cheeks, have ceased to flee, and have turned a lovely "am'rous" green.

And yet. And yet... Listen carefully.

> The Gods, that mortal Beauty chase,
> Still in a Tree did end their race.

Can you hear in that couplet an echo of Eden in solemn counterpoint to the playfulness joke about Apollo and Pan? Adam and Eve, like the gods of the Greeks, were immortal Vntil they chose to eat

...the Fruit
Of that Forbidd'n Tree, whose mortal tast
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden...

thus ending their race in that Tree.

SECOND MOVEMENT

Stanza 5

We know at once from the music of the Second Movement that we have entered into a quite different world from that of the First Movement. This world hardly remembers that other one from which we have been so suddenly translated. All that seems to carry over is the continuing rhyme of the preceding couplet, "speed/reed", "lead/head."

The Poet here speaks simply, directly, and in the first person. These stanzas are no longer clever.

To be sure, we are -- again, or perhaps still -- in a garden; but this is a very different garden, overflowing with the ripest and most varied fruits. After a moment, we recognize it as Paradise.

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

The quality of verse that we tasted earlier in Stanza 2,

To this delicious Solitude

is here sustained almost to the point of cloying. We seem to taste the Fruits as we voice the words. But they do not cloy, because their effect is not achieved for its own sake; and it has besides its own tang of wit. The Poet sees himself to suffer willingly the urgings of pleasure. After all, it is the vines and the fruits that thrust <u>themselves</u>

upon him. The "curious" peach (another double entendre) and its fellow, the Nectaren, nuzzle his hands like a pair of friendly ponies. The Melons roll on the ground before his feet, and the Flow'rs reach out to trip him up and bring him down.

All the motion is downwards, groundwards, in this stanza. The fruits all dangle down from their vines and twigs. The Melons sprawl all over the ground on their looping vines, and so in the end does the Poet sprawl on soft, green Grass, brought down by the Flow'rs.

Here is a stanza of sheer, innocent sensuality in which the pleasures of taste, touch, smell and sight are at once literal and metonymic.

Stanza 6

The green of the grass on which the Poet is lying joins us to the next stanza, which is the greenest of the poem.

> 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,
> Far other worlds and other Seas;
> Annihilating all that's made
> To a green Thought in a green Shade.

The astonishing conception of this stanza culminates in demand that the last line makes upon our imagination. Green shade we know. I myself think of it as being the light under the trees on the lawn of our front campus in Annapolis on a late afternoon or early evening in May.

But green Thought? Does Thought in general have a color at all? I am not sure of that. But I am sure of this much. If Thought has a color, that color is surely green. My proof is a thought experiment, and it is a negative proof. Try the other colors. Red? Yellow? Purple? Pink? Orange? Black? White? Do you see? None of these will do. And somehow, Green will do. In fact, it does admirably.

I don't think Marvell made up the color. I am reasonably confident that he simply saw it that way. For him Thought was green. And maybe our thought experiment lends some confirmation to the conceit.

But let's return now to the beginning of the stanza.

> Mean while, the Mind, from pleasure less,
> Withdraws into its happiness:

I think we feel that the Mind, somewhat fastidiously, withdraws for the time being, from any further association with the Body lying there on the grass in such a deplorable condition. The Body's pleasure seriously diminishes the Mind's; and in any case, the Body is not now in any shape to support serious thinking. Probably the Mind is glad to be rid of the Body for a while.

But where does the Mind withdraw to? If into itself, this would mean that the Mind is capable of existence separated from the Body and from the Soul. Its existential status would then seem to be different from that of either the Body or the Soul. The Body, after all, is simply lying there on the ground "at the Fruit-trees mossy root", while the Soul, "like a Bird" ascends into the tree. But where does the Mind go?

It seems significant that Marvell says "the Mind" rather than "my Mind." Marvell himself, reflecting on the Mind, calls it

> ...that Ocean where each kind
> Does streight its own resemblance find.

To me this suggests an ocean in which the forms of things dwell, and whenever we reach out with the understanding to grasp something in the world, that thing finds its own form in the Mind; and so we know it. For the thing known and its form in the Mind by which it is grasped are formally identical. At least in the Aristotelian teaching it is so.

I remark in passing that the Ocean is often green when we look at its surface, and that, when we see from below the surface, it is a is a cool, green, translucent shade. And of

course it is filled with all sorts of resemblant things, as sea lions, and seahorses, and starfishes.

But for Marvell, the Mind has a further faculty. I suspect that it is Imagination, both sensible and Intellectual, whereby it can (and does) invent other worlds that are quite different from the one created by God and given by Nature. In so doing the Mind may annihilate all that's made and construct other worlds of its own imaginings. Such worlds bear a doubtful relationship to the real world. Indeed, they may become confused with real world and under certain circumstances, even be preferred to it.

It seems to me that Marvell was here thinking of Decartes' teachings. And I feel a strong contrast between the French Philosopher sitting in his warm Dutch room, shut off from the outer world, wondering about the nature of things, wondering, even, if those things that he can see out of his window passing in the street below are indeed men like himself, or automata made to resemble men in order to deceive him. And then there is Marvell, meditating in his undoubted English garden and seeing somehow in a vision the constituent parts of his own being in terms of the manifest garden.

Stanza 7

Here at the Fountains sliding foot,
Or at some Fruit-trees mossy root,
Casting the Bodies Vest aside,
My soul into the boughs does glide:

Here all the motion is upward. The Body has stumbled and fallen down. The Mind has withdrawn. But,"Casting the Body's Vest aside,/My Soul into the boughs does glide." The motion of the Soul is swift, graceful and upward. Into the tree, which I take to be the Tree of Life.

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.

Released from the Body, the Soul takes the form of a wingèd creature and ascends into the tree, where it sits and sings.

Its singing is the first -- and the only -- sound in the poem. For Marvell, singing is the proper activity of the Soul. But before we think about what the singing might signify, let us think about activity of the Soul.

For Aristotle, the highest activity of the Soul is thinking. I have in mind the wonderful and mysterious passages that most of you know from Metaphysics XII, in which he says that divine thought thinks on thinking. Or again of Descartes, for whom Man is by definition a thinking being.

I am not entirely sure what either philosopher means, though I do not think they meant quite the same thing, And I do not believe that Marvell saw it their way. It may be that this is what the Mind, withdrawn into its happiness, is doing -- thinkng on thinking, I mean -- but it is not what Marvell sees the Soul to be doing.

For the Soul sings. Or it sings first of all. Marvell has in mind the image of a bird singing and obviously pouring its whole being into the act of song. Birds singing look like that. And so do human singers. Art does not deliberate. It simply does. A singer fully engaged in song is not thinking, but singing. She has become the music while the music lasts.(I think, for instance, of Elly Ameling.) The Bird here is the figure of Soul simply being what it is. Or doing what it is.

I think that, like the Bird, the Soul sings without words, for words are the product of the Mind and serve as go-betweens between ourselves and the world. But the Bird here is not thinking, it is only aware, and aware not of itself and the world as two things, but aware of the being of everything. Of the world and of itself, not separately, but all at once. In such a state one is not lost in the self, isolated and withdrawn, but the self is discovered along with all of the other beings in the world. And all are

felt to be a universe, a one-in-many. It is not same and other, but everything together in a whole.

I think the reason Marvell felt the Mind had to withdraw is because Mind cannot get up into that tree. Nor does it sing. It does not get you all the way to being.

The Bird does other things too besides singing.. It dresses its plumes, and reflects and refracts in its wings the different colored lights. For a moment, the color of the poem is no longer green, but iridescent. The Bird, no longer wholly beneath the Green shade (under the greenwood tree), has gone up into fuller light where it plays with the colors of the rainbow. All seven colors. A pleasure of seeing. Of vision.

The Bird is silver.

And it is preparing for longer flight. To a place, I take it, beyond the earthly paradise.

THIRD MOVEMENT

Stanza 8

Now, in another abrupt transition, we find ourselves back in the English garden where we began, and we don't know how we got there. But in terms of the myth, we know what has happened. Paradise has been lost again, as Paradise always is, and we are left in the world with memories of Eden.

To follow once more our musical analogy, this third movement is in two parts, the first in the minor, and the second in the parallel major. I believe, though I am not absolutely sure, that the minor is rather slow, another andante, followed by an easy allegro. Their subjects are, first, a reflexion on the middle movement, and then a turning to the English garden and a resolution of the melancholy in a reflection on Time again and on works.

Such was that happy Garden-state,
While Man there walked 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.

It is often assumed that this stanza is an easy essay at wit, this time the tired conventional jibe by a man at Eve and at women in general. Marvell allows you to think that, if you want to miss the point. But it isn't really likely that a poet of Marvell's gift would fail so easily.

The error arises from another equivocation, but this time we are required to reject one meaning of the equivocal word, Mate, namely, a spouse, and to take its other meaning, a fellow-worker, a companion, an assistant.

Marvell's plaint in the second couplet is not at all that Eve was a woman, but that she was another. AN OTHER. All of the distresses and perturbations of life in Society arise from other people, by no means only from other people of an opposite sex. No, the issue here is between Society and Solitude.

Solitude was restored temporarily to our Poet in his ecstasy and now has been lost again. For he will have to leave the garden. Residence in any garden is at best but temporary, for always the curse of work lies upon us. Our only solace is that we can sometimes retreat from Society, put the world behind us for a while, and recover a kind of wholeness. It is quite true that the world would have you believe that there is something perverse about such behaviour. It is called anti-social, and this is why our so-called leisure must be crammed with distractions.

This stanza, I think, does not need further commentary.

Stanza 9

Another abrupt change, but here we see quickly that the Poet has simply turned from the memory of the other Garden to the present, and is looking around him. He eyes fall on a sundial which, as he considers it, becomes allegorical.

How well the skilful Gardner drew
Of flow'rs and herbes this Dial new:
Where from above the milder Sun
Does through a fragrant Zodiack run;
And, as it works, th'industrious Bee
Computes its time as well as we.
How could such sweet and wholsome Hours
Be reckon'd but with herbs and flow'rs!

But a word about the Dial is needed. A correctly mounted sundial tells the time of day by casting the shadow of a small gnomon upon the numbers of the hours marked around its circumference. In Marvell's garden the Gardner has made a circular flowerbed centered on the column that supports the dial, and has divided the circle into pie-shaped sectors. He has planted these with flowers of different hues and scents, so that as the Sun moves the shadow of the column moves too from bed to bed and tells the time of day.

Thus, in Marvell's witty perception, the Sun runs through a fragrant Zodiack. Instead of Ram, Bull, Twins, we might have carnations, lavender and sweet williams. We could tell the time of day by smelling the flowers, and the season of the Year as well by the scents of the blossoms.

At first it seems strange -- perhaps even irrelevant -- to conclude this poem with this stanza about "th'industrious Bee who works by the hour around the flow'ry Zodiack. But, puzzling on not, the stanza <u>feels</u> right -- or perhaps I mean <u>sounds</u> right in its music and its images. And it is right.

Who is the Bee? He is, of course, a personification of industry. Marvell has told us that much. And his work, his proper act, if I may put it so, is to make honey. Unlike human toilers, he works not by mechanical and clock time,

but by the hours and the seasons of the year. Which is to say that he computes his time, not only as well as we do, but far better.

Furthermore, the Bee is the most social of animals. In his own society, which seems not to be onerous to him, his labour work is to gather nectar from the flowers, elaborate it into quintessential sweetness, and store it for the use of himself and his fellows. His work is sweet to him, whereas ours by Adam's curse has been made bitter and often vain as well.

We cannot live alone nor can we avoid the curse of labour, but we can, perhaps, temper these limitatations in some measure by rejecting vainglorious pursuits and by acknowledging only the legitimate claims of society.

Or to put it more simply, we should retreat often into a garden, which "is the purest -- note well -- the purest of human pleasures ...and the greatest refreshment to the spirits of man." And I think a real garden is meant, no figurative one,

By the end of the poem I think Andrew Marvell is ready to accept his exile from Eden and to go back to work in the world. Where, by the way, -- and I haven't said this -- he worked, first, in the civil service and then for the last twenty years of his life was a member of Parliament. He was a man of impeccable honesty for all that. He did not write his poetry for publication, and it was not published until after his death. Very probably he would not have wished this.

If there is any more to be said about The Garden -- and of course there is, as I cautioned you at the beginning -- much more --let us see what we find to ask and say about it in the Question Period.