

---

## The Problem with Ambition: Understanding "The Garden" Through Allusions and Close Reading

H.C. Beeching proclaimed about 'The Garden' that 'Marvell is the laureate of grass, and of greenery'. This is recognition of Marvell's desire to explore, effectively, the relationship between man and creation through the analogy of a Garden. However, it is important to note that there are many other facets of Marvell's writing that make 'The Garden' a multi-layered poem that discusses a multitude of different themes. We are also posed questions as to the benefits of blissful isolation through metaphors of shade, as well as the futility of ambition through comparisons to military victory. Therefore, while 'The Garden' does indeed explore the relationship between man and creation, it is also an effective argument as to how we should view isolation and ambition.

The primary way in which Marvell explores the relationship between man and creation is through an analogy of a garden, namely the Garden of Eden and what it can provide for humanity. E.K Chamber states, 'how should the intoxication of meadow, and woodland, and garden be better expressed' than in the lines 'Stumbling on melons as I pass, / Insnared with flowers, I fall on grass.' This is the first example of a multi-faceted approach to man's interaction with nature. Firstly, the 'stumbling on melons' provides the suggestion of the plentifulness the God has implanted within nature. Moreover, the 'melon', being a large, juicy fruit implies that nature is what gives us the ability to feed ourselves and thus, survive. Therefore, because we have a plentiful source of food, Marvell highlights the importance of nature to man as it is ultimately what sustains us in life.

Next, 'insnared with flowers', highlights the happiness of the speaker in being among the wildlife, and thus the enjoyment that nature provides to man. The speaker seems to be perfectly happy getting stuck in the flowers as he traipses about the garden. However, this has ominous overtones as it harks back to Genesis, where Eve, busy tending to the flowers of Eden, gets ensnared by Satan. This suggests that while nature greatly enriches our lives, we must be careful not to over indulge or we may too become 'insnared' by the Devil. Finally, 'I fall on grass' highlights the comfort that nature provides man. Despite the speaker evidently falling on the flowers, he seems almost relieved to have hit the grass.

From the imagery of 'grass', we gain a picture of smooth, soft bliss, like in a meadow and therefore the 'fall' that may have been so detrimental on a battlefield, turns into relief. This symbolises the relief that nature provides man from the 'rude' 'society'. However, there are also hints to Adams fall of man. Much like the previous line, the use of the word 'fall' suggests

---

### Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

[GET HELP](#)

---

the possibility of nature being removed if it is over indulged, much like in the Garden of Eden. This idea holds particular relevance nowadays as man seems to be over indulging in our environment to the extent that it is being destroyed. Moreover, at the time this poem was written, the start of the industrial revolution, this may well have also been the case.

Furthermore, Marvell discusses the use of nature as a protective function within humanity. To do this, he poses a mythological allegory within the poem from Ovid's 'Metamorphoses 1'. 'Apollo hunted Daphne so' and 'Pan did after Syrinx' relate to the stories in which two men (Apollo and Pan) fall madly in love with female nymphs (Daphne and Syrinx), but the ladies want nothing to do with them or any other man. The men chase the women all over the woods and are about to catch them when river gods decide to step in and save the the nymphs by turning the ladies into plants. Therefore, the 'race' of the gods, ends in the creation of trees.

The significance of this story is that it suggests the overall safety that nature provides man. Moreover, the extensive references to 'race's in stanza 4, suggest that it is in the fundamental human nature to do against our environment in search for 'mortal beauty'. Ardhendu De suggests that 'In this garden both man and nature is unfailing.' The suggestion is that our goal is to 'mortal beauty chase' is such that the nature we live in, is in itself immortal and thus better than any human beauty. The overall significance of the allegory in stanza 4 is to show that man requires nature in order to be protected from corrupted forces, such as the Greek gods that are portrayed in the story.

However, it is clear that man and nature are not the only concerns that are discussed throughout 'The Garden', and that the idea of isolation and solitude is central to the poem. Garrett Hazelwood states that 'Marvell uses the image of the garden and the shade it provides to symbolise a place of quiet and innocence, which he illustrates as an ideal environment for stimulating thought, progress, and reason.' To evidence this, Marvell speaks to the quiet he has found 'here', that is, in the garden. He compares his life now to what it was when he was trying to gain success in the world, and moreover, that society 'was all but rude'.

By 'rude' Marvell means uncivilised and thus indicates that the garden is his only escape from the unnecessary luggage of the world. Furthermore, Marvell suggests that he has been 'mistaken long' by 'sought'ing the 'busy companies of men'. By this, he is suggesting that in order to find the 'Fair Quiet' that he is looking for, he must go to the garden as it provides 'delicious solitude'. There is particular significance of the word 'delicious', as it suggests a sensual enjoyment of solitude that you may not find through conventional means amongst society. Finally, 'Only among the plants will grow' suggests that in order to gain real knowledge, one must get rid of 'society' and adopt solitude amongst nature, as your soul can only 'grow' when it is free from impurities. This sense of purity can only be found in the isolation of the garden, and therefore this theme of solitude becomes important to Marvell's

---

## Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

**GET HELP**

---

general outlook towards the metaphysical development of the soul.

The final concern of the poem that holds significance is the issue of ambition, and its relevance in living a life of 'eudaemonia' - Aristotle's idea of blissful happiness. The Garden opens on the theme of ambition, portraying human efforts seek to recognition. Symbolically, this recognition is in the form of laurels, made from 'the Palm, the Oak, or Bays'. These would have been how victors were crowned in classical times in the fields of military, civic, and poetic achievements respectively. However, in order to make these crowns, branches have to be cut down, and therefore the life of natural life is shortened. These laurels then fade, cut off from their natural source of life. If left in their natural state, they would have offered people peace and tranquillity, symbolised through the imagery of 'shade'. Lawrence Hyman supports this by stating that 'The Garden', 'depicts the prizes gained from endeavours seeking honour or material gain as casting a narrow shadow that fails to provide the shade he uses as a central metaphor in the poem'.

The overall effect of this imagery is to suggest that a quest for glory through ambition to conquer different fields is foolish as the best solution is within the garden itself. Marvell states that once, 'we have run our passion's heat', 'Love hither makes his best retreat'. Hither in this context is the garden, and it highlights that while our worldly ambitions will lead us nowhere, the eternal nature will remain in order to provide 'Love', which could well refer to Gods love, which ultimately is the only important thing.

While Marvell does clearly and effectively discuss the relationship between man and creation, in order to gain a full appreciation for 'The Garden', one must embrace the multitude of topics that are discussed. Concerns such as solitude and ambition hold great weight throughout much of Marvell's poetry, and thus, their significance as themes within the poem must not be overlooked.

## References

1. Andrew Marvell's 'Garden' of Enlightenment Thinking - Garrett Hazelwood
2. Hyman, Lawrence W. "Marvell's Garden."
3. Ardhendu De - The Analysis of Marvell's "The Garden" : Developed Through Studied Contrast
4. E.K Chambers - Revival of Interest
5. H.C. Beeching - Revival of Interest

---

## Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

**GET HELP**