There Is a Garden in Her Face

POEM TEXT

There is a garden in her face
Where roses and white lilies grow;
A heav'nly paradise is that place
Wherein all pleasant fruits do flow.
There cherries grow which none may buy,
Till "Cherry ripe" themselves do cry.

Those cherries fairly do enclose
Of orient pearl a double row,
Which when her lovely laughter shows,
They look like rose-buds fill'd with snow;
Yet them nor peer nor prince can buy,
Till "Cherry ripe" themselves do cry.

Her eyes like angels watch them still,
Her brows like bended bows do stand,
Threat'ning with piercing frowns to kill
All that attempt with eye or hand
Those sacred cherries to come nigh,
Till "Cherry ripe" themselves do cry.

SUMMARY

The lady's face is a lovely garden that grows roses and lilies. It's paradise; every kind of delicious fruit grows there, including cherries that no one can taste until the cherries themselves say they're ripe.

The lady's teeth are like two rows of lustrous pearls within those cherries. When the lady laughs, her mouth looks like a rosebud that has caught snow in its petals. But neither nobleman nor royalty can taste those cherries until the cherries themselves say they're ripe.

The lady's eyes watch over her cherry lips like guardian angels; her eyebrows are like drawn bows, ready to frown and shoot down anyone who tries to look at or touch those lovely cherries until the cherries themselves say they're ripe.

THEMES

WOMEN'S TANTALIZING BEAUTY

In this classic Renaissance love song, a speaker describes a woman's face as a beautiful garden. Alas for the speaker, this garden is awfully hard to enjoy: the lady in question is sparing with her affections, and won't let anyone in. Through an extended metaphor that presents the lady's lips as ripe but unpluckable cherries, the speaker suggests that female beauty can be both tempting and tantalizing, a pleasure that always seems to be just out of reach.

Like a good courtier, this poem's speaker praises a lady's face by depicting it as a paradisiacal garden. (See Shakespeare's satirical Sonnet 130 for a sense of just how common such comparisons were!) Her skin is like lilies and roses, her teeth as white as pearl. Most lovely of all, the speaker says, are her lips, which are like sweet cherries. In short, this lady's face strikes the speaker as nothing less than heaven on earth, a Garden of Eden full of fragrant flowers and sweet fruits.

The trouble is, the speaker goes on, nobody seems to be able to get into that garden or try the produce. As the poem's refrain repeatedly insists, nobody, not even a "peer" (a nobleman) or a "prince," is allowed to taste the lady's "cherry" lips until those lips themselves call "cherry ripe"—in other words, before the lady is good and ready. And it takes a lot for her to be ready! She guards her beauty with eyes that put the speaker in mind of stern angels, her eyebrows drawn like "bows" to shoot down unwanted suitors with her "piercing frowns." Like Eden, the heavenly garden of her face is strictly off limits!

All the lady's suitors are thus left to long for those metaphorical cherries without much hope of getting to try them—a predicament, this song hints, that might feel cruelly familiar to plenty of lovers.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-18

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

There is a garden in her face
Where roses and white lilies grow;
A heav'nly paradise is that place
Wherein all pleasant fruits do flow.

As Thomas Campion's contemporary William Shakespeare

knew well, there was nothing a poet of the English Renaissance liked more than comparing a lady to something she wasn't. In this particular 17th-century love song, the speaker chooses a classic horticultural conceit, a green and pleasant extended metaphor with which to sing a lady's praises:

> There is a garden in her face
> Where roses and white lilies grow;

The garden of this lady's face, in other words, marks her out as an ideal Elizabethan beauty. Those red roses and white lilies evoke her coloration: red cheeks, red lips, white skin.

This metaphorical garden is so lovely, in fact, that the speaker sees it as nothing less than a "heav'nly paradise"—a new Garden of Eden in which "all pleasant fruits do flow." Note the sensuous delight in the speaker's language there. If all fruits "flow" from this garden, then there's an abundant river of them, all the fruit you can eat. More than that, the word "flow" hints at the trickle of sweet juices as a lucky visitor to this garden bites into a pear or a nectarine. The alliteration here sounds tasty, too: the ripe, plump /p/ sound of "paradise," "place," and "pleasant" meets the light, smooth /f/ sound of "fruits" and "flow."

The garden of this lady's face, in other words, might be lovely to experience not just with the eyes, but with the lips. One look or one kiss from her, the speaker suggests, and it's as if the Fall of Man never happened: you're right back in Paradise.

Meter and rhyme make it feel as if, gazing at this lady, the speaker is lost in a happy dream. The poem is written in iambic tetrameter—that is, lines of four iambs, metrical feet with a da-DUM rhythm. Here's how that sounds:

> There is | a gar- | den in | her face

The poem pulses as steadily as a heartbeat. The alternating ABAB rhyme scheme in these first four lines also feels balanced and even, fitting for a description of a face as lovely as paradise.

This sestet isn't over yet, however. In the two closing lines of this stanza, the rhymes will switch to a firm CC couplet. Those changed lines will introduce the speaker's dilemma: the lady's paradisiacal face and its sweet fruits are out of his reach!

LINES 5-6

> *There cherries grow which none may buy,*
> *Till "Cherry ripe" themselves do cry.*

Among the "pleasant fruits" of the lady's face-garden, the speaker goes on, one kind in particular is the most tempting: the metaphorical cherries that represent her lips. Perhaps they seem especially delicious because "none may buy" them until they themselves agree to be bought. Only after her lips cry "cherry ripe!" can anyone have even the smallest taste.

Here, the speaker alludes to the traditional cry of fruit vendors with cherries to sell, making the lady's cherry lips both a delicacy and a merchant. These are cherries that are in charge of whether they get sold, and to whom.

After those images of roses and lilies in a "heav'nly paradise," the introduction of a fruit seller's shouts—and grubby commerce—feels a little jarring and a little comical. The speaker has left the Garden of Eden and headed out into the London streets.

For that matter, he's suggested that the lady might be holding off on sharing her cherries not because she's a chaste damsel who cares not for romance, or even because she's got her heart set on one man in particular, but because she's waiting for the right opportunity to take her cherries to market—to get something in return for her kisses.

There's a tension here, then, between the image of the lady as a blessed and "heav'nly paradise" and the image of the lady as a tasty fruit that's not for sale—yet. The speaker might at once be in awe of her loveliness and just plain frustrated that he can't get at those cherries for love or money.

LINES 7-12

> *Those cherries fairly do enclose*
> *Of orient pearl a double row,*
> *Which when her lovely laughter shows,*
> *They look like rose-buds fill'd with snow;*
> *Yet them nor peer nor prince can buy,*
> *Till "Cherry ripe" themselves do cry.*

The metaphorical cherries of this lady's lips capture the speaker's imagination. Here, he layers a simile on a metaphor on a metaphor:

> Those cherries fairly do enclose
> Of orient pearl a double row,
> Which when her lovely laughter shows,
> They look like rose-buds fill'd with snow;

In other, slightly less figurative words, the lady's cherry-red lips enclose pearly-white teeth. When she laughs, those cherries and pearls present yet another vision: it's as if her lips have become red rosebuds with snow between their petals.

This striking image restates the annoying fact that this lady is both beautiful and *cold*. Those rosebuds—always a symbol of passion—are both beautified and chilled by that untimely snow. Any potential kissing is *nipped in the bud*, as the saying has it.

As the second stanza ends, the speaker returns to the cheeky refrain with which he ended the first, reiterating that no one can buy those cherries "till 'Cherry ripe' themselves do cry." Here, he's even more emphatic about how inaccessible the lady is: with some punchy /p/ alliteration, he sulks that "neither peer nor prince," nobleman nor royalty, can get at those cherries, let alone lowlier schmoes. In other words, if this lady can be

bought, she certainly can't *easily* be bought, even by the rich and powerful. For now, she resists all suitors.

LINES 13-18

Her eyes like angels watch them still,
Her brows like bended bows do stand,
Threat'ning with piercing frowns to kill
All that attempt with eye or hand
Those sacred cherries to come nigh,
Till "Cherry ripe" themselves do cry.

In this closing stanza, the speaker explains exactly *how* this lady keeps everyone away from her cherry lips through a pair of similes:

> Her eyes like angels watch them still,
> Her brows like bended bows do stand,

The lady's eyes, in other words, stand guard over her lips like avenging angels, threatening to shoot down unwanted suitors with "piercing frowns." This image hearkens back to the first stanza's allusions to the Garden of Eden: after Adam and Eve were kicked out, an angel with a fiery sword was traditionally said to have been posted at the gates to stop them from getting back in.

If this lady's garden of a face is Paradise, then, it's paradise lost. The "sacred cherries" she grows are off limits to all humanity—at least "till 'Cherry ripe' themselves do cry," as the speaker's refrain reiterates one more time at the poem's close.

As the poem ends, readers might reflect on the speaker's tone. Campion originally wrote this poem as an "air," a solo song set to lute music. Performed to a courtly crowd, this song might have felt more like a nudge in the ribs than a love song proper. The poem's speaker here never declares that *he* is desperately in love with this lady; he only remarks on her beauty and her inaccessibility.

With its mixture of formal praise and cheeky allusion, "There is a garden in her face" thus both contributes to and winks at a grand tradition of love poetry, staying just a little on the outside of love itself.

POETIC DEVICES

CONCEIT

Like any good Renaissance love poet, this speaker relies on an elaborate conceit—an extended metaphor—to describe a lady's loveliness (and, in the speaker's opinion, her cruelty). This metaphor appears in the poem's very first line: "There is a garden in her face."

If the lady's face is a garden, it's a "heav'nly" one, a new Eden. It overflows with "roses and white lilies," flowers that signal the ideals of Elizabethan beauty: pale skin, blushing cheeks, red lips. Those lips, in fact, are the crown jewel of the lady's garden. In a metaphor within a metaphor, the speaker describes them as "cherries"—cherries that, as he repeatedly laments, no one can taste until the lady's good and ready to share them.

The lady's face is thus both inviting and forbidding. As John Milton tells us, Paradise is long lost; if this lady's face is like Eden, it's thoroughly off limits. Angels—her eyes—watch over her face holding the "bended bows" of her eyebrows, ready to shoot down suitors with "piercing frowns."

The conceit of the heavenly garden thus gets at exactly what frustrates the speaker about this lady. She's endlessly lovely and alluring, but she's simply not willing to invite anyone in to enjoy the pleasures of her beauty.

Where Conceit appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-6
- Lines 11-12
- Lines 13-18

SIMILE

Elegant similes evoke the fair lady's beauty and her stout refusal to bestow it on just anyone.

By the time the speaker reaches his first simile, he's already set up a pile of metaphors: the lady's lips are ripe cherries, her teeth are "orient pearl." He combines those images of redness and whiteness (key signs of Elizabethan beauty) to form a new one. When the lady laughs, he says, her lips "look like rose-buds fill'd with snow." Besides painting a vivid picture of a gleaming white smile within red lips (especially alluring in an era before toothpaste), this simile hints at the lady's *coldness*: that fresh red rose, always a symbol of sexual passion, might be nipped in the bud by unseasonable snows.

Later similes emphasize the lady's resistance to romance. Her eyes, the speaker sadly remarks, are "like angels"—but stern guardian angels, watching over her lips with "brows like bended bows," ready to shoot suitors down with the arrows of their "piercing frowns." This image suggests the lady guards her lovely body jealously. It also doubles down on the idea that her face is a heavenly garden. Just like Eden itself, this garden is watched over by angels with strict orders not to let anyone in!

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Line 10:** "They look like rose-buds fill'd with snow;"
- **Lines 13-14:** "Her eyes like angels watch them still, / Her brows like bended bows do stand,"

REFRAIN

This poem always returns to the same refrain, reiterating the same point: nobody can kiss this lady's cherry lips "till 'Cherry

ripe' themselves do cry." In other words, the lady's mouth is both the feature that makes people long for her and the feature that she uses to stave off unwanted suitors, declaring she just isn't "ripe" for kisses at the moment.

By using the same language over and over, the speaker emphasizes just how frustrating this state of affairs is for those unwanted suitors. Making the same point in different words just wouldn't have the same punch: by returning to a refrain, the speaker suggests that the situation with this lady is always *exactly the same*. Nobody can kiss her until she agrees—and she never, ever agrees.

The specific language the speaker uses also makes a little joke about the lady's relationship to her own beauty. "Cherry ripe!" is the traditional cry of street vendors with cherries to sell. Alluding to this call, the speaker suggests that the lady is both fruit and fruitseller, guarding her loveliness like valuable goods.

Of course, for women in Campion's era, this was a genuine predicament: women weren't meant to fool around with men before they were married (though, of course, plenty did). Selling those cherries before the time was truly ripe could have meant bad news for this lady; readers might sympathize with her reluctance to hand out kisses willy-nilly.

Where Refrain appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "Till "Cherry ripe" themselves do cry."
- **Line 12:** "Till "Cherry ripe" themselves do cry."
- **Line 18:** "Till "Cherry ripe" themselves do cry."

ALLUSION

The speaker's contrasting allusions—some to street sellers, some to the Fall of Man itself—give this song some tongue-in-cheek wit.

To start with the lighter reference: whenever the speaker reiterates that "none can buy" the metaphorical cherries in the fair lady's garden "till 'Cherry ripe' themselves do cry," he's alluding to the traditional cry of fruit vendors with cherries for sale. (Street vendors have long used trademark calls to advertise their wares.) Here, the lady becomes both the fruit itself and the person selling the fruit—a state of affairs that this speaker doesn't like at all, considering how it limits his cherry access.

At the end of the poem, the speaker refers to an even more forbidding situation. If this lady's face is a paradisiacal garden, it might be rather like Eden, the blissful place from which humanity was driven away. And if *that's* true, it's guarded by stern angels who won't let anyone in. While Eden is said to be watched over by an angel with a fiery sword, the lady's face is guarded by two metaphorical angels (her eyes) armed with "bended bows" (her arched eyebrows), ready to shoot down unwanted suitors with her frowns.

Both these allusions come down to the same thing: people want to kiss this lady, and she won't let them. But the difference in the allusions' scale and seriousness feels like a little wink, saying, *This is a big problem, and this is an ordinary problem.*

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "Till "Cherry ripe" themselves do cry."
- **Line 12:** "Till "Cherry ripe" themselves do cry."
- **Lines 13-18:** "Her eyes like angels watch them still, / Her brows like bended bows do stand, / Threat'ning with piercing frowns to kill / All that attempt with eye or hand / Those sacred cherries to come nigh, / Till "Cherry ripe" themselves do cry."

ALLITERATION

Alliteration makes this song's language suitably musical.

When the speaker describes the heavenly garden of the lady's face, for instance, his echoing sounds evoke his longing:

> A heav'nly paradise is that place
> Wherein all pleasant fruits do flow.

Notice that there's not just an alliterative /p/ sound here but a repeated /pl/ sound, suggesting the delectable plumpness of all those fruits. The alliterative /f/ sound, meanwhile, draws attention to the striking image of fruits that "flow." This might simply suggest that all lovely fruits *emerge* from this garden, but it also hints at the flow of sweet juices when a lucky person bites into one of those fruits.

Later on, a description of the lady's "lovely laughter" uses long, sweet /l/ sounds to suggest the sheer pleasure the speaker feels at hearing that laugh. Soon after, though, he uses a stern plosive /p/ sound of "nor peer nor prince" to stress that, even for the fanciest men in the land, hearing this lady laugh might be as good as it gets: no kisses are forthcoming. There's a similar blunt effect in line 14, where the speaker warns that the lady's "brows like bended bows" stand guard over her eyes and her lips alike.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "paradise," "place"
- **Line 4:** "pleasant," "fruits," "flow"
- **Line 9:** "lovely laughter"
- **Line 11:** "peer," "prince"
- **Line 14:** "brows," "bended bows"

VOCABULARY

Wherein (Line 4) - In which.

Cherry ripe (Line 6, Line 12, Line 18) - This was the traditional cry of cherry-sellers.

Orient (Line 8) - A very high-quality and lustrous pearl is said to be an "orient" pearl.

Peer (Line 11) - Nobleman.

Nigh (Line 17) - Near.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"There is a Garden in Her Face" is a courtly Renaissance love song, originally set to music. Like many songs of its era, it has a lot of fun with an elaborate conceit in which the beloved is metaphorically presented as something desirable—in this case, a paradisiacal garden guarded by scowling angels. (This kind of metaphor became such a cliché that Shakespeare felt compelled to write a whole sonnet mocking it—though he did plenty of this kind of thing himself.)

Campion lays out his metaphor in three short, sweet sestets (or six-line stanzas). Those sestets always end with the poem's refrain, which reminds those who'd like to kiss the lady's cherry lips that they're going to have to wait until she's good and ready (which she might never be).

METER

This poem is written in iambic tetrameter. That means that each of its lines uses four iambs, metrical feet with a da-DUM rhythm. Here's how that sounds in line 1:

There is | a gar- | den in | her face

This pulse-like meter ticks along pretty steadily, with only a few variations for drama. For instance, listen to the moment in line 15 when the speaker describes his lady's eyebrows as drawn bows just waiting to shoot unwanted lovers down:

Threat'ning | with pierc- | ing frowns | to kill

The first foot there is an emphatic trochee, a foot with a DUM-da rhythm, the opposite of an iamb—and it emphasizes just how "threat'ning" those brows are.

RHYME SCHEME

The poem's rhyme scheme runs like this:

ABABCC

The rhyme's movement from the alternating ABAB pattern to the closing CC couplet sounds even more emphatic when you consider that the couplet always ends with the same line, the poem's refrain: "till 'Cherry ripe' themselves do cry."

This pattern of rhyme elegantly mirrors the poem's ideas. The swaying ABAB sections dreamily describe the lady's beauty (or her sternness); the concluding couplets rise up and put an end to all that, as firmly as this lady refuses unwanted kisses.

SPEAKER

The poem's speaker reveals nothing of their identity: this is a song about a beauteous lady, not about the person who sings about her. The speaker's intense focus on whether or not it might be time to kiss this lady's cherry lips, however, invites readers to imagine him as a figure like Campion himself: a Renaissance courtier indulging in a little romantic metaphor-making.

SETTING

There's no clear literal setting in this poem: everything that happens here happens in the beautiful metaphorical garden of a lady's face. However, that elaborate metaphor itself suggests that this is a lady of Campion's own place and time: England around the turn of the 17th century. Comparing ladies to lilies and veal to venison was one of a Renaissance courtier's favorite hobbies—though, as this poem suggests, it didn't necessarily get them anywhere with the ladies in question.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Thomas Campion (1567-1620) was a courtier, poet, physician, and musician—in other words, a true Renaissance man. Most famous today for his "ayres" (that is, airs, songs for solo performance), he rose to prominence in the court of King James I by composing elaborate masques, spectacular performances that married music, drama, dance, and whizbang special effects.

"There is a garden in her face," originally set to music, is part of Campion's project to champion the simplicity of the solo air over the intricacies of the many-voiced madrigal (a form in fashion at the start of his career). He wished, he wrote, to compose "ear-pleasing songs without art"—that is, without stylish-but-mystifying complexity. His elegant songs (and his manifestos about music-making) altered the course of English songwriting.

Campion was a (close to exact) contemporary of William Shakespeare, and his poetry plays in the same fields: this poem's extended metaphor of a lady's face as a lovely garden fits right into a world in which lovers are summer days and human lives move like the seasons. This poem, first published in Campion's *Third and Fourth Book of Ayres* (1617), both adheres to and winks at the tropes of Renaissance love poetry.

Though Campion isn't quite so well known as his 800-pound literary gorilla of a contemporary, he left his mark, influencing later writers from T.S. Eliot (who called him "the most accomplished master of rhymed lyric of his time" besides Shakespeare) to W.H. Auden.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Thomas Campion lived through a turning point in English history: the transition between the reigns of "Good Queen Bess" (Elizabeth I, who died in 1603) and James I.

After a rocky start, Elizabeth stabilized an England thrown into turmoil by religious schism. Her father Henry VIII's decision to split from the Pope and found his own national Church of England led to generations of violent conflict between English Protestants and Catholics. Elizabeth's political skill, her dramatic military victories against the Spanish, and her canny decision to present herself as an almost supernatural, Artemis-like "Virgin Queen" all helped to create a new sense of English national identity in the midst of chaos.

She also became a symbol of ideal Renaissance femininity, from her makeup—stark white skin, red lips, red hair—to her stalwart virginity. Elizabeth consciously played the role of the Untouchable Woman, a role that the coy lady this poem describes also seems to be doing her best to fulfill. The English Renaissance was marked by male anxiety about women's desires; women were meant to stay chaste until marriage, but were also considered the more lustful and faithless of the sexes. A lady had to perform chaste virtue pretty hard to evade suspicion. The unmarried Elizabeth was the very image of a spotless lady.

When the Virgin Queen died and her cousin James (already James VI of Scotland) took the English throne, many of his new subjects at first regarded him with suspicion. He was a far less charismatic figure than his predecessor—and the son of the very Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots to boot (though he was himself a fervent Protestant convert). Worldly, intellectual, and superstitious all at once, James had a good eye for art, but was also pious in a rather paranoid way, anxious about demons and witches.

His court, however, would turn out to be a hothouse for poets and playwrights. James became the patron of everyone from Shakespeare to Donne, rewarding the artists in his employ with lavish commissions and important positions. James's discernment allowed Campion to rise from comparatively unremarkable London origins to wide renown.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- The Poem as a Song — Listen to this poem set to music, as Campion intended. (https://youtu.be/_R_pdf43ow8)
- Two Books of Ayres — See images from one of Campion's collections of lute songs (or "airs"). "There is a Garden in her Face" was published in a later volume of the same series. (http://www.luminarium.org/editions/camptwobookes.htm)
- A Brief Biography — Learn more about Thomas Campion's life and work via the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/thomas-campion)
- The Poem Aloud — Listen to a reading of the poem. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvp5cIqBVUA)

HOW TO CITE

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