

Guarding the
forbidden fruit: a
young girl clings to
her virginity and
innocence



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The narrator of Thomas Campion's "There Is a Garden in Her Face" warns fellow admirers of a young girl's beauty against taking advantage of her virginity. As indicated in the title, Campion uses words associated with gardens to describe the girl's beauty; upon closer examination, it is clear that Campion is really describing the girl's virginity. He informs us that she is not yet ready to lose her virginity and will "[threaten] with piercing frowns to kill" (15) anyone who tries to take it with "eye or hand" (16), by looking at her lustfully or by physically having sex with her. She is not yet "ripe" (6), and until she reaches that stage, "nor peer nor prince can buy" (11) her maidenhead. The Garden of Eden visible in the young maiden's face, which is created by Campion's use of concrete diction, extended metaphor, other symbolism, personification, and structure creates a picture of a young girl guarding her forbidden fruit and effectively communicates why any young lady would want to protect her virginity and innocence. The structure of the poem lays the foundation for the story being told. This poem is a lyric, meaning that it is short and specific, and the narrator is a persona of the poet. The poem is written in sestet which are in iambic tetrameter, and each sestet has an ababcc rhyme scheme and uses exact masculine end rhyme. The abab rhymes in the first four lines of each stanza give the poem a sing-song quality much like that of many nursery rhymes, which emphasizes the maiden's innocence and youth. The abundance of end-stopped lines also adds to the nursery rhyme feel of the poem because it adds an air of simplicity. The end-stops also reflect the girl's attitude in the poem –she will not give in. The punctuation at the end of each line is similar to the way people say the word "period" at the end of a statement that expresses their unwillingness to budge. The meter highlights the girl's

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youthfulness as well, as it allows one to read the poem much as one would read a story to a child. The rhyming couplets at the end of each stanza give a sense of finality, again indicating the girl's seriousness in holding on to her virginity. The line "Till 'cherry-ripe!' themselves do cry" (6, 12, 18) is a refrain throughout the poem. The refrain is the only line in the poem with a caesura, which causes readers to stop and really notice the phrase "cherry ripe" (6, 12, 18). The repetition of this line emphasizes the main point of the poem, that she is not yet "ripe." Campion uses myriad images to represent the abstract idea of virginity: garden, angels, white lilies, roses, pearls, rosebuds filled with snow, laughter, fruits, cherries, bended bows, and heavenly paradise. All of these images bring to mind visions of nature, purity, sweetness, and innocence. More specifically, the angels, flowers - especially the white lilies, pearls (usually white), and snow all symbolize purity. Snow also possesses the quality of coldness which indicates the girl's attitude toward those who want to seduce her. However, not all of the images Campion employs are white. Rosebuds create a powerful symbol of the young girl's stage in life because rosebuds come at the beginning of a rose before it has bloomed; they have not yet grown fully, so they symbolize perfectly the maiden's youth, along with the image of laughter which evokes images of the care free, playful, and innocent days of childhood. In fact, the repetition of the "l" sound in line nine ("lovely laughter") exemplifies alliteration and imitates the sound of laughter. Another concrete image Campion uses is the image of cherries. Cherries serve as an implied metaphor for her virginity. Also, cherries are personified because Campion gives them the ability to "cry out," which reveals that the maiden has not yet become physically ready because her virginity itself cries out to wait.

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Part of the cherry metaphor is the simile “ brows like bended bows” (14) indicate that her eyebrows represent the branches of the cherry tree. Line fourteen (“ brows like bended bows”) also uses alliteration, and the repetition of the stopped “ b” sound has a harsh feel and sends the message to back off, giving the branches a guard-like quality. The image of her piercing frowns represents the abstract idea of her anger toward anyone who tries to take from her that which she values so greatly. The greatest use of symbolism is the “ garden in her face” (1), an extended metaphor for the Garden of Eden from the book of Genesis. The maiden’s face is referred to as a “ heavenly paradise” (3) filled with flowers and fruits, just like the Garden of Eden. The young girl can remain in the garden because she still has the innocence of childhood. The “ sacred cherries” (17) to which no one may “ come nigh” (17) represent the girl’s maidenhead and are presented as the forbidden fruit such as that which grew in the Garden of Eden. Her eyebrows look like “ bended bows” (14), which represent the tree from which the forbidden fruit, in this case the cherries, grow. The loss of her forbidden fruit bears the same consequences as eating from the tree of knowledge. If she suffers this loss, she will know too much of worldly things, and her innocence will no longer be a part of her. She will be banished from the garden. Line thirteen says that “ her eyes like angels watch” over her body, which suggests the angels who guarded the gate of the Garden of Eden so that Adam and Eve could not re-enter after they had become impure. In much the same way, her eyes stand guard and do not let anyone in who has impure intentions. The girl’s eyes will also threaten to kill anyone who tries to come near the sacred fruit. These lines are the only ones in the poem that refer to death. In the book of Genesis, one of the consequences of Adam and Eve’s

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consumption of the forbidden fruit is death. They do not die immediately, but they will grow old and die someday because they eat the fruit. Similarly, if the young girl loses her innocence, her childhood ends, thus bringing her closer to old age and death. The major theme of Thomas Campion's poem is that love should not be forced before its due time, but guarded like forbidden fruit, because when one loses his or her innocence, he or she has come one step closer to old age and death. Works Cited Campion, Thomas. "There Is a Garden in Her Face". Poetry: A Pocket Anthology. Fourth Edition. R. S. Gwynn. 71.