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Topic: Thoughts in a Garden -Critical Appreciation

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THOUGHTS IN A GARDEN: CRITICAL APPRECIATION

Introduction to the Poet:

Andrew Marvell (1621-78) was a renowned Metaphysical poet, a politician, a satirist and held a remarkable position in literature. He was born in Winestead-in-Holderness, East Riding of Yorkshire, as the son of a clergyman. Educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, he became a tutor to the daughter of Lord Fairfax, and wrote the best poetries during this season (1650-52). Marvell was an acquaintance of Milton and protected him from the royal wrath. He also served as the Member of Parliament for Hull from 1659 until he died in 1678.

Poem:

‘The Garden’ by Andrew Marvell is one of the most complex poems with a blend of passion and wit, mixed with imagery, thus standing supreme in literature. The poem can be analyzed in a political manner and also with reference to the Bible. It’s striking conceits and psychological insights magnify the poem’s beauty and are characteristic of Marvell’s poems.

“The Garden,” which comprises nine eight-line stanzas, opens with the assertion that people ordinarily confuse themselves (“amaze,” with a possible pun on the “maze,” a common feature of seventeenth century formal gardens) by pursuing recognition in only one field, as represented by wreaths associated with military (palm), civic (oak), and poetic (bay) achievements. Against those conventional modes of activity, the speaker, who enters the poem as “I” in the next stanza, argues for the ease and retirement embodied in the combined vegetation of the garden. Its plants, he offers, will provide the quiet and innocence he has mistakenly sought in the busy world, for such conditions result not from “society,” but from “solitude.”

In the third and fourth stanzas, the speaker reflects on the destructiveness of lovers, who record their passions by carving their initials on trees. The white and red (pallor and blushing) of the lovers’ complexions are not actually as worthy of admiration as is the green of the restful garden. Against the intense pursuits recounted in classical mythology, specifically in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (c. 8 c.e.), the speaker (now using the first-person plural, “we”) proposes love’s retreat to the security of the garden.

With the fifth stanza, the speaker exalts in his own sensuous indulgence in the rich fruits of the garden. In an environment without passionate distractions, desire is transferred to the other senses, notably to taste and touch. The next stanza, however, suggests a transition from physical to

mental or intellectual fulfillment, as the mind withdraws from lesser pleasures (“from pleasure less”) to those of what might be called the creative imagination. The divisiveness of worldly pursuits, whether of ambition or love, resolves to the unity implied by the annihilation of “all that’s made/ To a green thought in a green shade.”

The seventh stanza opens to a spiritual transcendence, as the speaker, at the slippery (“sliding”) foot of a fountain or at the roots of a fruit tree (that is, at the point of origin), discards his physical being. His soul soars upwards and sings in preparation for a “longer flight” (presumably, its eventual glorification).

At this point, however, the speaker steps back from his prophetic speculation and drops into the past tense: Before the coming of Eve, man (Adam) experienced bliss, but it was not his destiny as a mortal to live alone. When he comments, “Two Paradises ‘twere in one/ To live in Paradise alone,” the speaker may be reasserting his view that this garden must be without the tensions of passion, or he may be restating his preference for total solitude.

The concluding stanza introduces a “skilful Gardener” who creates a sundial of flowers and herbs, thus reestablishing the world of time against the implied claims of eternity and the Edenic past of the previous two stanzas. The only industry in this garden of meditation and reflection, however, is that of the bee, which, unlike the busy humans of the opening sections, moves with the rhythms of nature

Critical Analysis

The Garden by Andrew Marvell is a unique poem which is romantic in its expression, metaphysical in its word-game, and classical in its music. It is romantic because it is about the nature in subject and theme, and it is the expression of the poet's personal and emotional feelings about life in the nature.

Its style is metaphysical because it uses the conceit, forceful argument, allusions from sources like the Bible, myths and metaphysical philosophies. And it is a classical poem in its form because the stanzas, rhythm, rhyme and word-choice is like in classical poetry. The theme is that the garden is the perfect place for physical, mental and spiritual comfort and satisfaction, unlike the society where pleasure is false and temporary.

The poet has finally found the nature and realized its value; he claims that the nature is the only true place for complete luxury. 'The Garden' is a unique metaphysical poem which is Romantic in its subject matter and also contains classical elements in its diction, meter and structure. The poem is written in heroic couplet, which deals with the poet's experience of feelings and ideas about the garden that represents the nature. The poet begins by comparing the nature with society and social life and criticizing the society and 'busy' worldly life.

In the first stanza, the speaker criticizes men who "vainly amaze" themselves by putting a garland of a few leaves and believing they have achieved victory, prestige and reward for all their endless labors. But in fact, the true and complete pleasure lies in the complete "garland of repose" in the nature. In the second stanza, he personifies the quietness and innocence in the nature and speaks to them saying that he has at last found them after losing his time in men's company. Then, he calls the trees "amorous" (sexually playful or powerful). Expressing such an odd emotion and attachment with trees, he criticizes lovers for cutting trees to write their beloveds' names. In the fourth stanza, he claims that when men's "heart" of love and youth is finished, they turn to the nature. According to the speaker, even the gods did this, when for example, Apollo and Pan changed their lovers into trees.

In the second part of the poem (stanza 3-7), the speaker develops his arguments and opinions about the nature. In the fifth stanza, he gives a very sensuous description about his physical pleasure. In the sixth, he argues that this pleasure is moreover mental. Here he uses an odd metaphysical philosophical idea that the mind contains another world and garden as well inside it. In the seventh stanza, he further claims that this pleasure has a spiritual aspect. He romanticizes how he feels; he feels as if his soul is singing and gliding from tree to tree as a bird, combing its feathers, and preparing for the eternal flight of salvation. Here is also an indirect allusion of the Holy Spirit of the Bible.

The third and last part of the poem is the conclusion (stanza 8 and 9). Before making the concluding remark that there can be no question of genuine pleasure without the nature, the speaker compares himself with the lonely Adam in Eden; he also argues that being lonely was a second paradise (heavenly state) for Adam, before Eve brought about the fall. In the ninth stanza, the speaker thanks God for creating a unique world of its own that is the garden. The garden or the nature in general, has its own time: the rush and hurry of the society doesn't apply here. Even the sun seems to have its own 'sweet' course. The garden is therefore the only source of true physical, mental as well as spiritual satisfaction and 'repose'.

As a metaphysical poem 'The Garden' uses conceit, wit, far-fetched images and allusions, and a dramatic situation. The balance of emotion and intellect is also another metaphysical feature. The romantic myths about god Apollo and Pan is changing girls and enjoying the nature, the Biblical allusion of Adam's "lonely" happiness are "heterogeneous ideas yoked by violence together" within the context of the argument. The trees and peace of the garden are personified. The argument about physical pleasure is twisted into the argument about mental pleasure. At that point, the poet brings a truly metaphysical idea about the mind. He argues –

according to a medieval philosophy – that his mind is an ocean of all the things and images of the real world. He further extends the idea of pleasurable experience by arguing that his pleasure is actually spiritual. There he goes on to create the imagery of his soul flying like a dove and preparing for the eternal flight of salvation. The same idea of spiritual pleasure is also related to the comparison with Adam in Eden. The last stanza also contains another metaphysical element: the idea of the garden as a separate sun-dial. The poem is also a dramatic and emotional expression of personal feelings, which is at the same time balanced with witty and intellectual ideas and allusions. This ‘unified sensibility’ also gives the poem another feature of metaphysical poetry.

As a classical poem, the poem exhibits the qualities like the use of a different poetic diction, heroic couplet, careful rhythm and design, classical and educated allusions, and so on. The poem’s main line of argument is not difficult to summarize. But, there are so many difficult words and even ‘ordinary’ words used in ‘unusual’ sense. Many sentences have a Latin-like word order, with the verb at the end, and so on. There is a classical perfection in its meter and design and structure as a whole.

The main theme of the poem is that peaceful life in the nature is more satisfying than social life and human company. The poem is striking in its sensuous imagery, witty ideas and a balance between romantic and classical elements, as well as its metaphysical qualities.

POETIC DEVICES IN THE POEM:

Symbolism:

- "the Palm, the Oke, or Bayes" symbolize crowns made from the trimmings of trees
- by representing societal pursuits, they signify limitations because the trimmings from plants do not last, whereas the living tree flourishes

Personification:

- "Society is all but rude" (stanza 2, line 7)

Metaphors

- in stanza 6, Marvell compares the mind to an ocean
- in stanza 9, the garden is compared to a galaxy: a bee's work represents time, and the flowers are Zodiacs

Similes

- "My Soul into the boughs does glide: / There like a Bird it sits, and sings"
- this quote along with the statement of "bodies vest" and "prepar'd for longer flight" is extremely important
- it says that the soul can slip out of the body and fly, but cannot entirely detach from the physical world until death
- therefore, they must perch in the highest reaches of the garden until their journey to heaven

Imagery

- the imagery in this poem conveys the sense of an idyllic garden, full of succulent fruit and solitude

- for example:

"Ripe Apples drop about my head; / The Luscious Clusters of their Vine / Upon my Mouth do crush their Wine"

- with such descriptive words, some also convey emotions

- for example: "green" can symbolize mildness, jealousy, tenderness, immaturity, or a flourishing and fresh plant

Rhyme: aabb

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