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Glossary

The Green—public/common park
 Shall—shall/will
 Binding—restricting
 Briars—thorny branches

Theme:

Distortion of Christian belief about future life, 'Falleness' on repression of sexuality + emotions

Form:

3 stanzas of 4 lines
 Each focuses on a different issue:
 1st—speaker's discovery
 2nd—speakers feelings about the building but expresses hope for consolation to be found in the garden
 3rd—speakers disappointment that this too has undergone drastic change

End rhymes in first 2 stanzas:
 ABCB DEFE

Internal rhymes with 'gowns' and 'rounds'; 'briars' and 'desires'

Sound Devices:

Rhythm—regular mostly due to steady meter + rhyming. However change in rhyme, pace + rhyme structures of the final two lines draws the readers attention.

Perhaps the speaker suggests that his world is now out of balance with his realisation + this new reality requires a different form of expression.

Various interpretations of the poem:

On one level it is simply a mark of the passage of time, and that as a result of human expansion, an open area of his childhood no longer exists. Speaker is in dismay, yet not particularly surprising.

However religious building that has usurped this land could imply a broader comment on organised religion and its influence on 'innocent' pleasures and freedom.

Diction = simple + straightforward, capturing natural expression of speakers experience. Innuendo is apparent as speaker doesn't express his anger, disappointment/outrage explicitly, but implies—L10+L12

Contrasts:

- ☐ Green vs. Black
- ☐ Flowers vs. Graves/Tombstones
- ☐ Flowers vs. Thorny Briars
- ☐ Playing freely vs. priests doing rounds
- ☐ Nature vs. man-made objects
- ☐ Growth vs. lifelessness (death)
- ☐ Softness/tenderness vs. hardness
- ☐ Gentleness vs. pain
- ☐ Light vs. dark
- ☐ Freedom vs. Restriction

Tone: (Author's attitude or feelings about the subject)
 reverie and scorn indignant

Mood: (Readers emotions from reading the text)
 despondency

The Garden of Love

William Blake (1757–1827)

Romantic

Understanding:

The speaker describes revisiting a place he remembers from his childhood, only to find that it has been taken over by a chapel or church. He is prevented from entering, so he attempts to explore the surrounding garden instead. The place which used to be full of 'sweet flowers' (line 8) has been filled with graves and tombstones instead. Additionally, patrolling priests, in dark robes, prevent him from experiencing or reliving his 'joys & desires' (line 12). He rebels against the idea of original sin and believes that love can't be sanctioned by religion.

Allusion—Garden of Eden

1 I went to the Garden of Love,

2 And saw what I never had seen:

3 A Chapel was built in the midst,

4 Where I used to play on the green.

Use of punctuation to add emphasis to his content: L1 + 7; 3+5 are capitalised 'special place' 'small church' which underlines the importance of its position to the speaker.

symbolises growth, fertility + birth. Public park—playful, imagination + innocence.

5 And the gates of this Chapel were shut,

6 And Thou shalt not writ over the door;

Gates shut, not free to act, associated with the loss of lives. Private property 'Thou shalt not enter. Capital letter and full stop highlights L6 making the command forbidding + hostile.

Allusion—The Ten Commandments

7 So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,

Institutionalized religion destroyed the garden of love

8 That so many sweet flowers bore.

Tenses= L2 + L8 in the past suggests the passage of time.

Figuratively—this experience amounts to a sudden realisation of what has been in front of the speaker for some time, but he was unable to 'see' the reality clearly before.

Anaphora: 'And' repeated

9 And I saw it was filled with graves,

10 And tomb-stones where flowers should be:

11 And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,

12 And binding with briars my joys & desires.

Bleak unproductive landscape of unfilled yearning. Change aura of total unease + misery death now.

L 11 echoed — members of the church loom large in this place. Not a positive image/ sinister overtones; black = threatening—act like guards/sentinels to keep out undesirables.

Background notes of poet

William Blake was born in London, in the United Kingdom, in 1757. He was a poet, artist and mystic, and his poetry is amongst the most lyrical and prophetic in the English tradition. Blake was a non-conformist and a radical who was concerned with many of the social injustices of the day, as well as being profoundly spiritual. Both aspects are reflected in his works. He died in poverty in 1827, and his genius was only truly recognised after his death.

The Romantic poem **The Garden of Love by William Blake**, published in 1794 as part of the Songs of Experience, consists of three quatrains, i.e. three stanzas having four lines each. ... One can, however, find a couple of internal rhymes in stanza two (shut - not) and three ("gowns" - "rounds"; "briars" - "desires").

Themes**The distortion of Christian belief about the future life**

Blake attacks the approach of some forms of contemporary Christianity which encouraged the denial of sexuality and other powers in the present, in the hope of future reward and bliss. He felt that this led to permanent failure to attain human fulfilment.

The effects of 'fallenness' on repression of sexuality and other emotions

Blake believed that inhibitions lie primarily within the mind, rather than in external factors. Society makes its fears, guilt and shame into rules and laws which are then enshrined in social institutions such as the authority of parents, the Church and the State or Monarchy.

The poem is the antithesis to The Echoing Green of Innocence, as it uses the same setting and rhythm to stress the ugly contrast. Blake firmly believed that love cannot be sanctified by religion. The negative commandments of the Old Testament, 'Thou Shall Not' could not enshrine the most positive creative force on earth. For Blake, sexuality and instinct is holy, the world of institutionalized religion turns this instinct into imprisonment and engenders hypocrisy. Those rules, which forbid the celebration of the body, kill life itself.

During reading

1. Why do you think the 'Garden of Love' (line 1) is written with capital letters?
2. Why can the speaker not enter the 'Chapel' (lines 3 and 5)?
3. How does the speaker feel about the presence of this chapel?
4. What has replaced the flowers in the 'Garden of Love' (lines 8-9)?
5. What do you understand by the expression 'walking their rounds' (line 11)?

Content

- In this poem, the speaker describes revisiting a place he remembers from his childhood, only to find that it has been taken over by a chapel or church. He is prevented from entering so he attempts to explore the surrounding garden instead. Here he finds that the place which used to be full of 'sweet flowers' (line 8) has been filled with graves and tombstones instead. In addition, patrolling priests, in their dark robes, prevent him from experiencing or reliving his 'joys & desires' (line 12).
- This poem could be interpreted in different ways. On one level it is simply a mark of the passage of time, and that as a result of human expansion, an open area of his childhood no longer exists. While this is cause for dismay for the speaker, it is surely not particularly surprising.
- However, the fact that it is a religious building that has usurped this land could imply a broader comment on organised religion and its influence on 'innocent' pleasures and freedom.

Summary

- The speaker visits a garden that he had frequented in his youth, only to find it overrun with briars, symbols of death in the form of tombstones, and close-minded clergy.
- "The Garden of Love" is a deceptively simple three-stanza poem made up of quatrains. The first two quatrains follow Blake's typical ABCB rhyme scheme, with the final stanza breaking the rhyme to ABCD. The lack of rhyme in the last stanza, which also contains the longest lines, serves to emphasize the death and decay that have overtaken a place that once used to hold such life and beauty for the speaker.
- Following the specific examples of flowers representing types of love, this poem paints a broader picture of flowers in a garden as the joys and desires of youth. When the speaker returns to the Garden of Love, he finds a chapel built there with the words, "Thou shalt not," written overhead. The implication is that organized religion is intentionally forbidding people from enjoying their natural desires and pleasures.
- The speaker also finds the garden given over to the graves of his pleasures while a black-clad priest binds his "joys and desires" in thorns. This not-so-subtle critique shows Blake's frustration at a religious system that would deny men the pleasures of nature and their own instinctive desires. He sees religion as an arm of modern society in general, with its demand that human beings reject their created selves to conform to a more mechanistic and materialistic world.

Imagery and symbolism

- The garden of love - The dominant image evokes two gardens in the Old Testament. Firstly, it evokes the Garden of Eden before the Fall of humankind. When Adam and Eve were in the garden, they were able to love without shame and self-consciousness. It was a place, therefore, of innocent, uninhibited sexual expression. The state of the garden discovered by the speaker is therefore akin to Eden after the Fall, when sexuality is surrounded by shame, repression and prohibitions.
- The second garden is found in the Old Testament poem, the Song of Songs. This is an unashamedly erotic poem in which garden imagery is used as a metaphor for sexual enjoyment. However, the contemporary Christian reading reinterpreted the original

eroticism of the poem, to make it a symbol of a 'purer' spiritual love, implicitly demoting the worth of sexuality.

- **The green**

The colour green is associated with growth, fertility and spring

Village greens were places of play and freedom. They represented the importance of play, and therefore of imagination, in human life.

Village greens were not owned by anyone, so represented freedom from the rule or demands of an authority figure.

- In the Songs of Innocence, the green is a place of play and freedom for children. It evokes a time of innocence in which 'play' could include innocent, unselfconscious sexuality. Here it has been taken over by repressiveness.

- **The Chapel**

It is bounded by 'gates' which are 'shut'

It is a place where people are not free to act ('Thou shalt not')

It is associated with the loss of life ('graves')

Its priests wear uniforms (they are all 'in black') and patrol the grounds like warders

They confine any initiative toward freedom ('binding... desires'), in a potentially painful way (using 'briars').

- Here, in this poem, the poet rebels against the idea of original sin. Man was expelled for eating of the fruit of knowledge and, cast out of Eden, was shamed by sexuality. In the poem, the poet subverts orthodoxy and the patriarchal authority figures of the daddy and God and his Priests. The Dissenting tradition to which Blake's family belonged believed in "inner light" and "the kingdom within". Moral laws without any rationale are not to be obeyed. In 'The Garden Love', interfering priesthood and the powers of prohibition blight innocent affections. The Church of Experience like the King and State rely on such powers to ensure obedience. A contemporary reference linked with the poem is that of the Marriage Act of 1753, passed by Lord Hardwicke. These Acts stipulated that all marriages had to be solemnized according to the rules of the Church of England in the Parish Church of one of the parties in the presence of a clergyman and two witnesses.
- With the loss of rural society and extended families in villages this legislation was perhaps necessary, especially in urban centres. However, for Blake this was equal to curbing individual freedom. For him, each prohibition created repression, therefore in The Garden of Love, we see a bleak, unproductive landscape of unfulfilled yearning where sterile resentment, fear, guilt and joylessness replace the open freedom of innocence.

THE GARDEN OF LOVE. - WILLIAM BLAKE!

- ↳ proper noun.
- ↳ imagery → garden of eden → prior to sin.
- innocence of childhood.
- ↳ allagorical satire of the English church.

S1

- ↳ revisiting a place from his past.
- ↳ been replaced with a church.
- tone → shock.

Chapel → capitalisation = central, focus.
↳ man made oppression
social constructs.

used to play / taken away.

green - nature.

innuendo: the green garden was destroyed
by religion.

S2

'shut' - finality. NO ENTRANCE.

thou shalt not - commandments

the source of inequality.

the period says it's a list.

L7 → juxtaposition.

bore → past tense

∴ change over time.

S3

- greeted by the opposite image of his childhood.
- graves → death of freedom.
- oppressed his choices.
- no flowers → against nature (love).

walking their rounds → methodical/routine

binding + briars → alliteration.
thorny tree branches
crown of thorns.

Garden Eden → a place of sexual freedom.

Tone:

Shock
dismay
anger
frustration.

Themes:

- Distortion of Christian belief
- Oppressive role of Church
- Control of people.

THE GARDEN OF LOVE

WILLIAM BLAKE!

→ a romantic.

late 1700's - early 1800's.

celebrates the natural world, critical
of man-made social structures.

1 Songs of Innocence + Songs of Experience

✱ organised religion.

— The title and the content are contradictory.

8 syllables (all 4) ABCB

9 syllables (3 line) } DEFE
7 (end line) }

8 }
8 } no rhyme. } draws attention
10 }
11 } G
H
I
J

Chapel (e3) → usually positive connotations

green → a park of sorts.

→ not owned; open to people.

[l1-2 : something hopeful.

[l3-4 : 'used to play' → now it's organised and controlled. NOT PLAYFUL. restricted.

[l5 - rejection.

6: 'Thou shalt not.' the full stop makes this a broad statement to any action.

[l7-8. Turning to what he knew → dismayed by what he finds.

l 9-10: graves + tomb-stones are a result of the Church and linked to the death of freedom.

l 11-12: black: spiritual death.

briars + binding.

↳ taking thorns to tie up his thought + desires, like christ's crown.

binding → negative connotations.

→ enslaved, captured, subjected, restricted freedom.

pys + desires

↳ something sensual + sexualities

↳ organised religion has stopped this expression of natural (human) pleasures

the sin is the church's strictures!