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THE GARDEN OF LOVE

I went to the Garden of Love,
And I saw what I never had seen;
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And “Thou shalt not.” writ over the door;
So I turned to the Garden of Love,
That so many sweet flowers bore.

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be;
And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars, my joys & desires.

William Blake

THE GARDEN OF LOVE - IMAGERY, SYMBOLISM AND THEMES

Imagery and symbolism

"*The Garden of Love*" serves as a metaphor for Blake's vision of the way in which the religious system has replaced a celebration of the goodness of sexuality with reasons for shame and repression.

The green:

This has three, inter-linked aspects

- 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 Blake's *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.



Prison – Blake's opposition to the repression of desires as advocated by conventional Christianity meant that the Chapel seems an image of prison:

- 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').

ANALYSIS

This poem describes a man who has found that his once happy childhood is dominated by a church, which is the Chapel. His once happy childhood memories are gone, and replaced by death and grief, represented by the tombstones. It seems that he is

despairing over the fact that he cannot love who he chooses, and he cannot be happy with the eyes of the church upon him. The rhyme scheme is a-b-c-b; d-e-f-e for the first two stanzas, and the last stanza does not rhyme.

William Blake was both frustrated and fascinated by Christian laws on fidelity and marriage. '*The Garden of Love*' is his attempt to depict Christianity as an obstacle to pleasure.

"*The Garden of Love*" is a poem from the book of "Songs of Experience" written by William Blake. "*The Garden of Love*" is a poem mostly written in anger towards the Church. "*The Garden of Love*" is a **metaphor** for something or someone that has been destroyed or taken away from Blake, or somebody else because of the Church. The line: "*Where I used to play on the green*" expresses the feeling that whatever it was the Church had taken away was something that was very close to the narrator. It could have been love, a place, money or a vision ... Something that was important or had special meaning. The poem focuses on a negative view of the Church. It describes the chapel as a big building with shut doors, put in a place where there should be nothing but love and joy. The line "*And the gates of this Chapel were shut and 'thou shalt not' writ over the door*", suggests that the Church was a closed and intolerant place, lacking the ability to accept any other feeling or faith. The line "*Thou shalt not*" could be Blake's way of expressing the intolerance and the many forbidding rules of the Anglican faith. Graves have replaced flowers; death has replaced life. Where there used to be a garden of love there is now nothing but intolerance, sorrow and death. "*And tomb-stones where flowers should be; and priests in black gowns were walking their rounds*". The priests were dressed in black, the colour of sorrow. The line "*And binding by briars my joys and desires*" suggests that life was being held back because of the Church. The Church was overly controlling of what people did and how they lived.

ANOTHER INTERPRETATION

A man comes to a garden and sees it has been changed from what he saw it to be in his youth. Where once was the green grass and nature with its beauty had dominated its environment, now stands a Chapel. He understands that the carefree life he had when he was a child, now wasn't full of happiness anymore. The church was now in the center of it: a chapel was built in the midst and it was now in control of his life. It was the beginning and the end of everything that surrounded it

He looks at the chapel and sees that its gates are closed and there is "*Thou shalt not*" written on its door. The church doesn't welcome anyone who doesn't want to live by its rules. It doesn't welcome those whose hearts are still full of joy of life. The church demands obeying of the rules it has made for us, and condemns everyone who wants to live by their own terms. The chapel represents the idea that the church – when we grow older – we notice to have more power on us than God Himself.

So the man looks away from the Chapel and back into the garden of love. He still tries to seek for something that could be left from his youth but instead he saw it was filled with graves, and tombstones where flowers should be. In the same place where

innocence has bared its roots, was the graveyard. His dreams that once flourished full with imagination lay now under the weight of the gray tombstones.

The man is in despair, when he sees what he has lost and what happened to him and the world around him. It's too gloomy in this wrecked garden of his. It seems like his Garden is some form of dystopia, a place where all his fears became real. A place from where he doesn't see a way out. He knows that he's lost his youth forever and now that he is mature, he has to face the reality in its rawest form.

William Blake capitalizes the words Garden and Love, because their meaning are much deeper than the simple interpretation of the word. Love with a capital letter is more to be taken like a First Love: the same love that was given to man from God. Not just feelings from certain person to another and definitely not a romantic love. Garden is a place in our hearts where we preserve that primal emotion. But Blake shows us that in time that emotion whiter and disappears from our Garden. So Garden reminds us of the Garden of Eden where everything was pure until the evil came and corrupted the good. That happens to almost every soul, so that there is no good when a man has lost his purity.

However, the poem is mainly about how the Chapel has changed the Garden. Especially that can be seen in the last lines of the poem. *"And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds, And binding with briers my joys and desires."* Like some kind of creatures of the dark they surround us, making everything bleak and unimaginative. When talking about briers, Blake probably refers to the same brier that Christ was wearing on the day of His crucifixion. So priests are encouraging us to live a joyless life. As Christ suffered for us, we have to suffer too.

Blake's view on the church of those days isn't the most pleasant one and for a reason. When he saw people getting poorer and poorer everywhere around him, he couldn't understand the church getting even richer, when one of its most important purposes includes taking care of those who suffer. Instead of that the only thing that the church seemed to value is the love of power and money, and easiest way to get to them was walking the road that was built especially for them in the name of God. Many horrible deeds have been done under that name so it seemed to Blake that God have abandoned the church and in order to find Him we'll have to seek for him somewhere else. For instance in those forgotten places where we have left our innocence. In our personal Garden of Love.

This poem is actually very interesting as it not only juxtaposes the flowers and graves; which symbolize life vs. death but it gets into the keys issues of Theocracy and how it can have a negative impact on society.

The imagery is striking, with anticipation turning into horror, and joy turning into anguish. The garden becomes the setting for a forbidding chapel, the flowers have been dug up for graves, and the carefree playground is policed by sinister black priests marching to an ominously precise beat ("priests in black gowns were walking their rounds"): you can almost hear the drumbeat that precedes an execution.

The garden of love is an allegory for his childhood romances. He yearns to revisit them, but things have changed. His former sweetheart will no longer play along ("the gates of this chapel were shut"), perhaps because she is already married to another. The innocent lovemaking that he remembers ("where I used to play on the green") has now been demonized ("thou shalt not commit adultery").

Chastened, he turns to the other girls ("sweet flowers") that he used to flirt with. But many are already dead or moribund ("tombstones where flowers should be"), and the remainder are hidebound by moral conventions, and dead to his advances. The shadow of the Church ("priests in black gowns") chokes the relationships which he hoped to re-establish ("binding with briars my joys and desires"), and the poem ends abruptly with his desires unconsummated.

The idea that the Church is identified by what it condemns instead of what it allows is depicted in the images of the Church gates being shut with the words, "thou shalt not;" and in the figures of the priests. The notion of darkness and the night as forces that deprive play (a recurring motif in Blake's poems) are seen in both poems but in the Garden of Love, the darkness is linked with death, the ultimate end. In the Garden of Love it is the dominant, negative force as the child has grown up. Therefore, we can surmise that the Garden of Love depicts that influence of the church on society and the experience that comes with the transition from childhood to adulthood (innocence to experience) and learning more about the bitter reality of life where love is not enough, in contrast to the ignorance of play.

Blake writes an expose of how true religion dampens the creative spirit as expressed with hopes and desires.

Blake was a Christian in the true sense of the word. He believed that Christ's message of love for all mankind had been corrupted by organized religion.

I think this poem tells us how everything man likes is sinful. The poet loves the garden. It shows the joys and happiness he craved from life. But all of them were sinful so God gave him the Ten Commandments. Man is now bound with all the rules and regulations of the church. So man is depressed because all his joy is labelled as sin.

The poet says that his Garden of Love looks like a graveyard as all he loved till now is prohibited by the church and it has taken man's freedom away.

The Garden of Love by William Blake is such a haunting poem. It is very much like a nightmare in that the images, like figures in a dream, are symbols which abide at the very core of all of us (or at least, we who are Christians). Symbols which are ordinarily considered benign turn on us, becoming monstrous and wicked.

The experience of Blake's poem is very like that. In the first stanza he paints for us a very trusting and child-like scene. "Garden" and "love" both have pleasant associations. "Garden" is sweet, fresh, quiet and beautiful. It also suggests order, attention and especially wonder. And "love"? No word in our language lends itself to so much meaning, yet is so elusive to definition. "God is Love" is certainly important to this idea, and so is care, gentleness, protection, and, loosely, all things "good".

This garden is a very special place to the Speaker. The fourth line tells us that he used to play in the Garden. "Play" tells us he was probably a child when he knew this place; and "used to" lets us know that he plays there no longer. Although the Speaker doesn't say so, we readers probably don't imagine this means he simply started playing somewhere else, but instead we assume that he no longer plays, and therefore is no longer a child. This assumption is mandatory, for the meaning of this poetic allegory rests on the contrast of youth (and its associations of joy and innocence) to maturity (and its associations of knowledge and experience).

Upon returning to the playground of his youth, the Speaker is surprised to find that a chapel has been erected right in the middle of it. A chapel is a building with religious connotations. It is a house of God, a place of prayer.

I would like to suggest that the Garden of Love is an internal estate, a place that exists only "within" the Speaker. It is the place where his childhood wonder lived, and played. It was the source of his joy and awe. If we grant that, then to find the chapel in the midst of it suggests that in adult life, God and the Church are a primary source of wonder, or as Canadian poet Bruce Cockburn writes prayerfully "In the place my wonder comes from, there I find You."

Moving to the second stanza, we are surprised to find that the chapel is not what it seems from a distance. "The gates of this chapel were shut," barring access to his wonder and direct contact with God (although allowing direct contact with priests, as we shall see). The inscription over the door is even more disquieting, that such a negative statement should summarize and define the Church we so cherish. The gravity of the message "Thou shalt not" is aided in that all three words are stressed, slowing us down while the mouth reforms for every syllable. There are few readers who cannot, I think, identify with the oppression of the Law (which the inscription symbolizes) or its influence on our lifestyle and world view.

Disappointed, the speaker turns to find consolation in the wonder of his youth, only to face the horror painted vividly for us in the third stanza. Suddenly his childhood Eden has been transformed into a macabre vision of death, apparently as a result of his investigating the chapel, perhaps symbolizing that his once awe-stricken rose-colored world has been usurped by the Church, who has painted everything over with black morbidity. The final images nail the horror home as "Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds, And binding with briars my joys and desires", physically enacting the script "Thou shalt not" written over the door of the chapel.

The long "o" sounds in line "foster the feeling of doom," and the words "walking their rounds" give the impression that this is not an impassioned or infrequent occupation of the priests, but rather routine, methodical and perpetual. The internal rhyme in each of the last two lines slow us down, emphasizing the oppression and again suggesting a cyclic, ongoing action. It is also ironic that such horrid images should be captured in the last line by such delicious rhyme, rhythm and alliteration.

The effectiveness of this poem (as in most *good* poetry) lies in the skill of the author to take us with him, and to allow us to experience his emotions. Not to just explain what happened to us, but to *have it happen to us*. To allow the willing reader to "posses" the speaker and experience his adventures first-hand. In *The Garden of Love* we enter with the same expectations as the Speaker, deceived by the title and relaxed with the positive images. But his horror becomes our horror, we are repulsed *with* him, and despair with him.

ANOTHER ANALYSIS

I'd like to start my analysis of William Blake's "The Garden of Love" with those lines by William Blake. He refers to the way he's reading the bible compared to the way the church is interpreting it. I think that this quotation reflects the contradictions and ambiguous relations between William Blake and the Church of England. Or rather the way the Church of England was interpreting the Bible and how they wanted the Bible to be read and comprehended by common people. This is connected to the poem, which is a criticizing the Church of England.

"The Garden of Love" was published in 1794 as part of the "Songs of Experience".

The special idea of the poem is a lyrical "I" that is walking around a special garden, which is the "Garden of Love". The lyrical "I" discovers that the garden has changed. There used to be flowers in the garden. But they are gone and instead the lyrical "I" finds itself confronted with a chapel that was built in the garden. Furthermore, there are graves, tomb-stones and priests in the "Garden of Love".

The poem creates a feeling of anger and dismay about the changes in the garden. The lyrical "I" is dismayed about the changes and because its wishes and desires will remain unfulfilled. What's next is that the beauty of the "Garden of Love" faded away through the change. It is accusing the priests and the chapel of being responsible for his unfulfilled wishes because they are "binding with briars" his "joys & desires".

There is a structure in the poem regarding the thoughts and feelings of the lyrical "I". In the first stanza the lyrical "I" describes its wandering through the garden and the changes that it discovers, meaning a chapel where it used to play. This stanza is quiet and gives no hint on negative feelings or thoughts due to the change. In the second stanza it describes the situation in the garden. It's said that the gates of the chapel are shut. There is an inscription above the gates with a general prohibition addressing all mankind. The lyrical "I" is turning its attention towards the beautiful garden. In the third stanza the lyrical "I" is describing the garden. It's naming the changes in the garden, the graves, tomb-stones and priests. The lyrical "I" is disappointed by the changes.

The lines are getting more and more emotional, energetic and aggressive throughout the poem. The first stanza is describing a peaceful and idyllic scene. There is no tendency towards aggressiveness and tension yet. But at the beginning of the second stanza there is a turn. The poem is getting more and more negative. There is a contradiction between the peaceful garden scene and the chapel with its closed gates and the inscription. There is a certain tension rising in those lines. The last two lines of

the second stanza are again emphasizing the idyllic character of the garden. But in the last stanza the tension is at its highest level. It seems to be harsh and energetic. The words used are containing harder sounds, like in “grave”, “priests”, “black gowns”, “briars” etc. Those voiced and voiceless stops are making the words sound not soft, but rather spitted out with energy. Those lines are full of energy and disapproval. There is a connection between the formal structure and the emotions expressed by certain lines. All lines that are transporting a negative feeling of disapproval or dismay are beginning with the word “And”. In the first stanza there is already the first glance of dismay when it says “And I saw what I never had seen”. In this context it sounds rather insignificant, but in relation with the following lines it is clear that here we can find a first contradiction to the idyllic garden scene. It’s slowly getting more and more obvious that something has changed in the garden.

The lyrical “I” does clearly detest the changes in the Garden of Love. It is referring to the church and expressing its dislike. Those lines represent a clear critique addressed to the church and their practices regarding religious beliefs. What’s even more, is that the lyrical “I” accuses the church of “binding with briars my joys & desires”, meaning not allowing the lyrical “I” to be happy but rather putting pressure on it. Compared to the reality in 18th century England, the doctrines and practices of the Church of England, this might express how those felt who did not follow the Church of England and did not agree with their way of interpreting the Bible. It is a provocation and thus still reflecting a part of reality in the 18th century.

STRUCTURE

The poem consists of three stanzas with each 4 lines, meaning three quatrains. There is no consistent end rhyme scheme. Only two end rhymes are used. In the first and second stanza, lines two and four rhyme (seen – green / door – bore). But Blake is making use of a couple of internal rhymes. In the second stanza, lines one and two, an internal rhyme occurs in “shut” and “not”. In the last stanza its “gowns” and “rounds”, as well as “briars” and “desires”. The meter of the poem is not consistent. The first stanza starts with a regular, harmonious amphibrach. In the second stanza, there is a change in the meter. Blake is here making use of an anapaest, but it still sounds harmonious. Whereas, the last stanza is compared to the previous stanzas a bit disharmonious regarding the meter and the length of the lines. In the first line it is still the anapaest of the previous stanza and then there is a turn. The meter is changed to an amphibrach again. In the first stanza we find a trimeter, which can be found in the second stanza too and at the beginning of the third stanza as well. But in the last two lines of the third stanza Blake is making use of a tetrameter, meaning the lines are longer than the previous ones. The meter is not regular, which means Blake is not using one meter consistently throughout the poem.

The opening line of the poem—“I went to the Garden of Love”—is significant in several ways. First, it already establishes the importance of the individual speaker (the “I”) whose perspective the poem reflects. The “I” in this case, as in so many of Blake’s poems, is an individualist who does not necessarily or automatically conform to the expectations or values of others. He goes to a *garden* of love, a word that suggests a

place where beauty is deliberately cultivated. The fact that this is a garden of *love* may indeed remind us of the first and most important of all gardens: the biblical Garden of Eden, an earthly paradise full of beauty and established because of God's love so that love and happiness among his creatures might flourish.

The first line of "The Garden of Love," then, might just as easily appear in one of the *Songs of Innocence*. In line 2, however, dark experience enters the poem: the speaker is now confronted by something he never before "had seen" in the garden. His sense of surprise helps create our own. He sees that a "chapel" has been "built in the midst" of the garden (Line 3) – not at an entrance, not off to the side, but directly "in the midst."

Although a sincere Christian, Blake felt that the established church had often corrupted and profaned the ideals associated with Christ. Our first hint that the speaker may be dismayed by the erection of the chapel in the middle of the garden of...

SUMMARY

The narrator tells of his visit to the Garden of Love and of the chapel standing where he played as a child. Instead of welcoming him in, the chapel has the negative 'Thou shalt not' of the Ten Commandments written over the door. The narrator sees that this negative morality has blighted the garden as well, reducing the 'sweet flowers' to graves and tombstones. The mechanical ritual of the priests 'walking their rounds' threatens to choke out the narrator's life itself.

ANALYSIS

The key to the poem lies in its second line. The narrator is talking about the change in how he now sees his surroundings, not a change in the garden itself. The poem is central to Blake's design in the *Songs of Experience*, as it marks the psychological passage from childhood innocence to adult experience. There are strong echoes of the passage from innocence to knowledge of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Just as their tasting the apple has commonly been interpreted as a sexual awakening, so too the narrator's 'joys and desires' include the physical pleasures he is denied by the rule-bound morality of the church. The last two lines, with their heightened meter and rhyme pattern, sum up what Blake saw as the threat of losing the 'joys and desires' of childhood innocence: unless we can develop our creative imagination to replace that lost innocence, we will lose the essence of life itself.

In this poem, Blake may also be attacking a new chapel built in Lambeth near his then home. This chapel was built by subscription: parishioners paid for their pews. Blake was appalled at the idea that those who could not pay would be excluded from Christianity's 'Garden of Love'.

THE GARDEN OF LOVE - LANGUAGE, TONE AND STRUCTURE

LANGUAGE AND TONE

'Thou shalt not' are the opening words of seven of the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament (Exodus 20:2-17). Blake attended the Swedenborgian chapel over which the

opposite sign was displayed: 'Now everything is allowable'. (This idea was also taken from the Bible, but used out of context – see 1 Corinthians 10:23.)

The language works by contrasting the freshness and freedom of the previous state of the garden with the darkness and deadness of the present:

- The green contrasts with the black gowns of the priests
- The flowers contrast with graves and tomb-stones
- Playing freely is contrasted with the priests walking their rounds (in prescribed routes)
- Flowers are also contrasted with thorny briars.

These involve contrasts between:

- What is growing and what is inanimate
- Natural and man-made
- Soft/tender and hard
- Gentle to the touch and painful
- Light and dark
- Free and controlled.

STRUCTURE AND VERSIFICATION

The first two stanzas have a rhyme scheme a-b-c-b, d-e-f-e. In the first stanza, the first closed couplet sets the scene and the second arouses expectation. The opening couplet of the second stanza answers our initial question. The second couplet is not closed but arouses further expectation – what will be found in the garden? The answer is provided in the third stanza.

Here the initial element of predictability is disrupted. There is no end-rhyme, but the last two lines are shaped by internal rhyme: '*gowns*' – '*rounds*'; '*briars*' – '*desires*'. Our expectations of what we might physically find in a garden of love are confounded, echoed by the confounding of our expectations regarding pattern and rhyme.

Furthermore, the new double rhymes of the closing couplet create an impression of how comprehensively the speaker's hopes have been crushed.

The easy anapaestic trimeter of the first two stanzas is halted by the heavy treble stresses on '*Thou shalt not*' in line 6, which conveys the severity of the prohibition. Then, in the third stanza, the rhythm is further disrupted by the lack of an expected syllable after '*graves*' so that the word gains extra weight. This heaviness is increased by the change to tetrameter for the last two lines.

The poem, *The Garden of Love* by William Blake, 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.

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 Nobodaddy 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 centers. 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 ANALYSIS

*I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.*

The twelve lines of the William Blake's poem *The Garden of Love* belong to the state of Experience that characterizes the present day world. Experience stands in total contrast to the state of Innocence.

The poet revisited the Garden of Love, open green piece of land where he used to play with boys and girls together. He was dismayed to see there what he had never seen earlier. He found that in the green open place, a Chapel (church) had been erected in the middle of the place where boys and girls together used to play. Institutionalized religion thus destroyed the Garden of Love. In the world of Experience, the harmony between man and nature no longer existed. Earlier the Garden of Love seemed to be in state of idyllic beauty, but the present day scenario of the place is one of utter sadness and gloom.

*And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And Thou shalt not. writ over the door;
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,
That so many sweet flowers bore.*

In the second stanza, the poet gives further description of the place of his revisit. The gates of the Chapel were closed. And the closed door had got written on it 'Thou Shalt Not.' So, the visitor (the poet) turned his attention to the place of the Garden of Love where it used to bloom a number of flowers but found them missing. In fact, the very idea of chapel and the negative "Thou Shalt Not" suggests the concept of private property, which is the source of all inequality and helplessness in society. The gate is closed to the passer-by and on it is inscribed the warning 'Thou Shalt Not'. The warning is emblematic

of the classic dictum of the Old Testament God-Jehovah who is seen as a prohibitive and a vindictive tyrant.

*And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be:
And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars, my joys & desires.*

The lines of the third stanza depict the adverse changes that have enveloped the Garden of Love during the present time. The Garden portrays an aura of total unease and misery. At present, the garden seems to be filled with graves and tombstones which are images of death, and so horrendous and undesirable. Even the priests wrapped in black gowns forebode an ill-omen and an act of mourning and despair. The priests depict a total official manner devoid of any compassion or even forgiveness. This seems to be the basic factor that binds the narrator's desires and joy.

It could be that earlier, the Garden presented the state of innocence where an environment of gaiety and mirth prevailed and everybody could enter the place without any discrimination whatsoever. But now it seems that the Garden has been lent or sold out to a private individual who exerts the sole authority and hence, the others are devoid of any joyous moment. The present day scene looks quite dismal where even such a simple resort as the garden is unable to escape the evils of industrialization and subsequent phenomenon of private ownership.

Personal Comments

The Garden of Love is another allegorical poem satirical of the Church. It is an attack on the morality which puts restrictions on sexual love. The speaker finds that a great change has come over the Garden of Love. He finds that a field of activities which should be spontaneously enjoyed has been made ugly by the interference of religious notions which insist on man's guilt and shame. The Church has spoiled the beauty and natural vigour of the pleasures which were once there to be enjoyed and substituted reminders of man's morality and eventual corruption, which are consequences of sin.

In *The Garden of Love*, there is a strong condemnation of the Church in its approach to sexual matters, and it is difficult not to agree with the attack made by the poet.

In all religion, there is a tendency to elevate the spiritual at the expense of the physical, and in all religions there are sects which take this tendency to an extreme, viewing the promptings of the body as low, especially the sexual urge. The effect poem falls on this aspect as well as on the prohibitions imposed by the "Chapel". "Thou Shalt Not" does more than restrict activity: it alters the complications of doubt and perplexity. The damage done by the "briars" is a self-imposed one once they have been placed.

The speaker here relates a personal history: he talks of "my joys and desires" as being "bound". He has now reached a position where he can see that what has been done to him was an evil. The tone of the poem is indignant, and the "priests in black gowns" are

sinister figures. The obvious solution is to remove the evil by changing his notions about sexual matters and so liberating himself from the prohibitions imposed by the Chapel. But it may be too late for that.

THE GARDEN OF LOVE:

In *The Garden of Love*, William Blake portrays his disgust towards the church of his day and all the restrictions and limits it puts on his joys and desires and the way he expresses Love. He displays this foreboding tone with the use of imagery and symbolism.

It tells of a chapel that has been erected where the narrator once used to play. Already, the reader can see that the church is restricting Blake. Where he once used to frolic, there is a mammoth building hindering him from doing so. The next verse goes into more detail as it describes the doors of the chapel. On them are written, "Thou shalt not", a blatant allusion to the Ten Commandments of the Bible. The fact that the words chosen to adorn the doors to the church are restrictive in nature, instead of an instructive "Thou shalt", demonstrates the constrained state that the church puts Blake in. Discouraged by the limiting statement on the doors, the narrator turns to the rest of the Garden in hope of finding "sweet flowers".

Sadly, all he sees when he turns is a forlorn and gloomy sight – a desolate graveyard, filled with tombstones. In the middle of this graveyard are priests, outreaches of the church, fastening together his "joys and desires" with briars, symbolizing the rules the church weighs upon him, and thorns. These are his final hopes, killed.

Throughout the poem, Blake's colorful use of imagery and heavy symbolism express his resentment toward the church. He makes obvious how he feels, that it is restrictive in nature and hinders him from expressing his loves, joys, and desires with all the rules and regulations that it places upon him.

VOCABULARY

Chapel	a place of worship, temple, church
midst	middle
green	grassland, lawn
rounds	a route or sequence by which people or things are regularly supervised or inspected, e.g. a watchman's round
briars	any prickly or thorny bush

‘THE GARDEN OF LOVE’

Understanding the poem

- 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 and 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.

Form and structure

- This poem consists of three stanzas of four lines each. The stanzas are used to focus attention on different issues: The first stanza tells us of the speaker’s discovery; the second reveals the speaker’s feelings about the building but expresses hope for consolation to be found in the garden; the third stanza describes the speaker’s disappointment that this, too, has undergone drastic change.
- The rhyme scheme makes use of end-rhymes in the first two stanzas, using the pattern of a-b-c-b, d-e-f-e. The poet uses internal rhyme with ‘gowns’ and ‘rounds’ in line 11, and ‘briars’ and ‘desires’ in line 12.

Poetic/language devices

- Blake makes use of punctuation to add emphasis to his content: ‘Garden of Love’ (lines 1 and 7) is capitalised as the proper noun to name a special place, one that had a specific name. The word ‘Chapel’ (lines 3 and 5) is also capitalised, which given that ‘chapel’ means a ‘small church’, seems to underline the importance of its position to the speaker. This is echoed by the capital letter for ‘Priests’ (line 11), as if these members of the church loom large in this place. The capital letter and fullstop are used to highlight the sign ‘Thou shalt not’ (line 6), making the command forbidding and hostile.
- The poem’s diction is simple and straightforward, capturing the natural expression of the speaker’s experience. The use of innuendo is apparent as the speaker does not express his anger, disappointment or outrage explicitly, but implies it in the phrase

'where flowers should be' (line 10) and 'binding with briars' his 'joys and desires' (line 12).

- The reference to the 'Priests in black gowns' (line 11) who are 'walking their rounds' (line 11) is not a positive image. A perfectly acceptable situation where priests are perhaps saying prayers in the chapel grounds is given rather sinister overtones. The 'black gowns' seem somewhat threatening, while the action of the priests suggests they are like guards or sentinels to keep out 'undesirables'.
- The use of tenses in 'never had seen' (line 2) and the garden that 'bore' (line 8) flowers in the past suggests the passage of time. In a figurative interpretation, it could be implying that 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.

Sound devices

- The rhythm of the poem is mostly regular, due to the steady meter and rhyming. However, the change in rhyme, pace and rhyme structures of the final two lines draws the reader's attention.
- Perhaps the speaker suggests that his world is now out of balance with his realisation, and this new reality requires a different form of expression.

QUESTIONS

1. How do we know that the speaker had positive memories of the place the poem describes?
2. What does the word 'midst' (line 3) mean in the context of the stanza?
3. The speaker seems to paint a negative picture of what the garden has become. Without changing the 'facts', discuss how different impression could have been created.
4. Comment on the effectiveness of the description 'binding with briars' (line 12).
5. What view of organised religion could Blake be presenting in this poem? Find evidence in the poem to support your answer.

ANSWERS

1. The phrases, 'Where I used to play' (line 4) and 'That so many sweet flowers bore' (line 8), prove that the speaker's memories are pleasant ones.
2. In this context, 'midst' (line 3) means 'in the middle'.

3. The new structures could have been presented in a positive light as signs of progress and transforming a wasteland. Similarly, the speaker might have praised the newly established graveyard as the ideal final resting place and admired the development.
4. The alliteration of the phrase 'binding with briars' (line 12) draws our attention. The image of the priests in 'black gowns' (line 11) who seem too intent on repressing all joy and employ restrictive measures as they close off all paths with barriers of thorns is effective.
5. The speaker disapproves of the development that has taken place. Adding to his dismay at the radical change to a favourite childhood meeting place is the hostile nature of the church and its graveyard. This is at odds with what one expects from a church as this one does not welcome visitors and seems repressive, strict and joyless. Perhaps the poet intends this as a general observation of the effect of organised religion and the power it has to clamp down on pleasure.