

THOUGHTS IN A GARDEN by Andrew Marvell: Summary and Critical Analysis

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SUMMARY

“Thoughts in a Garden” by Andrew Marvell is a unique poem which is romantic in its expression and metaphysical in its word-game. 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 (references) from sources like the Bible, myths and metaphysical philosophies. The theme is that the garden (which is the symbol of life in nature) 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 poem is written in heroic couplet. The poet begins by comparing the nature with society and social life and criticizing the society and ‘busy’ worldly life.

CRITICAL APPRECIATION

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 “incessant” labours. Here he seems to be mocking at sophisticated and kingly pretensions of love for nature. 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, 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 actually mental pleasure. Here he uses an odd metaphysical philosophical idea that the mind contains another world and garden inside it. In the seventh stanza, he further claims that this pleasure has a spiritual aspect. The poet feels as if his soul were 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.

In the third and last part of the poem, the poet compares himself with the lonely Adam in Eden. He argues that being lonely the heavenly state for Adam and it was Eve who brought about their downfall. The garden or the nature in general, has its own time: the rush and hurry of the society doesn't apply here. The garden is. Therefore, the only source of true physical, mental as well as spiritual satisfaction and 'repose'.

As a metaphysical poem "Thoughts in a Garden" uses conceit, wit, far-fetched images and allusions. The balance of emotion and intellect is also another metaphysical feature. The romantic myths about god Apollo and Pan and 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 and even sexualized. 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. This 'unified sensibility' also gives the poem another feature of metaphysical poetry.

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 its metaphysical qualities.