King Richard Garden Essay Example

Gardens are often symbols of beauty and fertility, a place where great and wonderous things happen. However, gardens can be fickle things, requiring a great deal of support, care, and guidance, less they grow out of control and destructive. In this excerpt from Shakespeare’s Richard II, an extended garden metaphor and a biblical allusion to the Garden of Eden are used to convey the king’s culpability in the chaotic state of the kingdom, as well as his impending doom. Overall, this passage suggests that a leader must be both caretaker to his kingdom and people as well as ruthless “executioner”(10).

To maintain order in a garden, strong, desired plants must nevertheless be pruned so that they can grow in a fruitful, useful way. The same can be said of a kingdom. The gardener suggests that without “wound[ing] the bark” plants grow “over-proud in sap and blood/with too much riches, it confound itself” (37-9). Men, or the underlings, when given too much freedom will do the same. They will start to believe too highly of themselves and eventually ask for more than they deserve, even taking away from others. A good gardener, or a good king, must cut away those ugly parts and check the growth of those eager upstarts. If he does, the gardener will see the “fruits of duty” because the underlings will both understand their place and be thankful for the glory they have been given (42).

Unfortunately, King Richard has not done this. He has allowed the young upstarts to grow to the point of overwhelming the garden. Worse, he has allowed “weeds” to grow under his “broad-spreading leaves” (28). Not only has he not checked the growth of the fruitful trees, or the potentially loyal servants, his negligence reached so far as to encourage and protect those who would do both himself and his kingdom harm. These “weeds” apparently pretended to support the king, and even helped him to stay in power. However, they were also “eating him” (29). They slowly sapped him of any authority or power, making him incapable of fulfilling his responsibility, even were he inclined to do so.

Therefore, it is no wonder that he and his corrupt entourage have been “plucked up by the root” (30). The gardener delivers the news that the weeds, “the Earl of Wiltshire, Bushy, Green” have been killed and the king will soon be deposed (31). Whether Bolingbroke is the gardener, or simply one of the upstart saplings, is yet to be seen. Either way, he is in charge of the garden now. This news is shocking and disheartening to the queen who, upon her emergence, continues the garden metaphor. She, however, suggests that he garden is *not* unruly and chaotic as suggested by the servants, but is in fact the biblical Garden of Eden. As the queen, she must believe her husband is doing well and is the godlike ruler of the kingdom; otherwise, her own position is in jeopardy. Therefore, only an “Eve,” or a vicious, lying “serpent” could have fed these “ill tidings” to the innocent, yet “little better thing than earth” figure of the gardener (54-8). He is “old Adam’s likeness” who can be easily duped; there is no way that the news she has just heard could be true (52). This allusion suggests her own inability to accept the truth of her husband’s position, especially because it would then suggest her own vulnerability.

Whether one is a king or a gardener, it takes a great deal of hard, tenacious work to lead others and maintain order. As the gardener suggests, one must check the growth of “too-fast-growing sprays”, and root up the weeds that seek to “suck the soil’s fertility from wholesome flowers.” People must live in the world of man, not the paradise of Eden, which would not require any of this work to be done. Unfortunately for himself, and his queen, King Richard has forgotten this fact and his negligence has led to his doom.