SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PHYSICAL GARDENS AND THEIR LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS

Olga PANZARU [1]

e-mail:opanzaru@yahoo.com

Abstract

As it has been mentioned by many scholars and researchers it is impossible to say whether the first earthly paradise gardens drew their imagination from real, humanly cultivated gardens or whether they in fact inspired, at least in part, the art of gardening in its earliest aesthetic flourishes. What we can say, however, is that we know of these gardens through the written documents that preserve ideas of agricultural and horticultural perfection and that these written documents have inspired many physical gardens. Being governed by the cycles of birth and death, dictated by the seasons or the life spans of the plants, every garden is in some way a re-creation, an altered version of other gardens. Any garden in the Western world and in the East, is never just a garden but always a reminder of paradise, of the Garden of Eden, of Elysium. Gardens were often designed speciffically to imitate their literary counterparts, inviting the visitor to read another, often mythological, level of meaning into the landscape.Taking into account that although the uses and ideals attached to the garden have changed over the time, the desire to re-create Eden remains a constant in the developing attitudes and styles of gardens, our paper aims to underline the symbiotic relationship between physical gardens and their literary representations, the correlation of which influenced the development of garden design and of metaphorical gardens in literature.

Key words: garden, artefact, Eden myth, symbolism, visual text

Every garden functions uniquely as the crossroad between culture and nature. No other landscape is invested with the same mythology of origin or holds the same powerful image of perfection as the garden. Encapsulating the organic world in sublime miniature, the garden appears sometimes simply as a setting; at other times it would appear to have a symbolic function, allowing the human subject to conceive security and even redemption within its walls. The image of garden as Eden, or ”divine garden” has been used as a traditional feature of mythology and literature throughout history and across many cultures.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Any symbolic artefact will change over time in terms of what it can be said to ”mean”. As Barthes hypothesises in his *Mythologies* (1957), everything is subjected to the imposition of meanings (or connotations) and no cultural object, garden included, is ever ”pure” or ”natural”. What appears to be natural is, in fact, determined by history. Gardens made of soil and plants have always had a close relationship with those conceived in the written word; the primal gardens of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the Bible, Homer’s *Odyssey*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* are all experienced primarily through the act of reading in both religious and secular spaces**.** The image of any garden represents the ” Eden”, and its definition like that of any other symbolic artefact, depends on extrinsic socio-cultural factors, and thus changes with time. In her historico-cultural scientific research, *The Enchanted Garden: a changing image in children’s literature*, (2010), Catherine Beck has examined the role of garden in literature written for children between 1850 and 2000, in which the garden is considered from two perspectives: as a setting for children’s play and as a cultural symbol that changes over time to reflect social concerns. The garden’s appearance as a literary setting may derive from its biblical use as a symbol of original innocence**.** The garden is a potent psycho-cultural icon that has been used to define and control the concept of ”childhood”. The notion of garden could suggest a series of ”structural oppositions” such as innocence/experience, civilisation/nature, home/away, enclosure/exposure, all of which are typical concerns of literature in general and particularly significant themes in children’s literature**.**The author discusses the nostalgia for childhood and the image of the garden as a garden of Eden from which we are forever excluded, once adolescence is past and judges the definitions of the alternatives of Eden: past/present, rural/urban, agricultural/industrial to be heavily dependent on the surrounding cultures, on anxieties about industrialization. Michael Waters considers that the Garden in the Victorian literature is identified with the

[1] Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine University of Iasi

more positive qualities ascribed to the countryside and frequently functions as a synecdoche of, or surogate for nature in its pastoral and generous modes In antitheses are the city –the negation or subjugation of nature – and the wilderness –nature in its sublime, threatening and least co-operative modes. (Michael Waters: *The Garden in Victorian Literature*, 1988) The garden in such texts no longer represents childhood itself, but an Arcadian version of the past Garden's essential nature is as a place in which the child is protected by the adult from the outside world. The garden is an extension of the home. It ia a safe, enclosed place out of doors, where the opposites of nature /civilisation and home/away may meet. Catherine Beck in *The Enchanted Garden: a changing image in children's literature* (2010) explores both literal and metaphorical ways in which the garden in literature for children demonstrates ways in which children are viewed as being and growing.Garden represents "secure liberation, that is: freedom from fear, limited freedom from adult interference, freedom from adult problems, freedom from the need to work, freedom from the authorial exploitation of childhood, freedom to play, freedom to play out roles, freedom to live out fantasies of omnipotence. The author discusses the nostalgia for childhood and the image of the garden as a garden of Eden from which we are forever excluded, once adolescence is past.In Chapter 2 **,** "*The Garden as Eden* : *the loss of childhood*" the central theme of Eden myth is the loss of innocence which the sinner (that is the experienced adult) is forever banished.As we have already mentioned, the Garden of Eden has multiple and "conflicting" associations" : it may be both idyllic and fraught with loss and error; it may be the site of perfection and the location of the fall.The Garden of Eden is the biblical "garden of God", described most notably in the *Book of Genesis* chapters 2 and 3. Traditionally, the favored derivation of the name "Eden" was from the Akkadian *edinnu*, derived from a Sumerian word meaning "plain" or "steppe". *Eden* is now believed to be more closely related to an Aramaic root word meaning "fruitful, well-watered." The story of Eden echoes the Mesopotamian myth of a king, as a primordial man, who is placed in a *divine garden* to guard the *tree of life*. The man was free to eat off of any tree in the garden, but forbidden to eat from *the tree of knowledge of good and evil*. Last of all, the LORD God made a woman (Eve) from a rib of the man to be a companion to the man. In Chapter 3, the man broke the commandment and ate of the forbidden fruit, and was sent forth from the garden to prevent him from eating also of the tree of life, and thus live forever. (Cohen C., 2011).One could say that every garden at some level is itself a text; visitors are to experience the garden on multiple sensory levels, reading it as a kind of narrative. We " read " the colours, smells, shapes, and atmosphere of the garden; we "read" through topographical and geometric design, placement of plants, architectural elements, and the iconography of the material arts, particularly statuary, bas reliefs and fountains. These art works depicted familiar stories, providing visual texts that often mirrored the garden landscape itself. Gardens were often made to imitate their literary counterparts, such as the *Garden of Hesperides* or Alcinous' s garden in Homer. Mythological characters enacted their written narratives in statuary gracing fountains and grottos, carved in bas relief and friezes, painted on walls. In turn, writers such as Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton and others enriched their narratives with *textual gardens* that mirror the visual elements and political significance of spectacular estate gardens, such as Kenilworth, Somerset House, or Pratolino (near Florence). From aristocratic spectacles to Spenser's epic poems to theatrical gardens, to gardens imagined in Shakespeare's theatre, from scientific botanical gardens to court masques, and from the republican communal garden plots to Milton's radical conception of the horticultural landscape, the garden as microcosm represented an idealized vision of England as paradise. In essence a kind of " feedback loop was occuring between actual and literary gardens" says Amy L. Tigner, in Introduction to *Literature and Renaissance Garden from Elizabeth I to Charles II. England's Paradise*, (p.3)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the early modern period, the garden was important in terms of political and philosophical ideologies because the image of the Eden, the "imaginary paradise", offers the possibility of redemption and restoration. As Amy L. Tigner has pointed out in her book, *Literature and Renaissance Garden from Elizabeth I to Charles II.England's Paradise*, (2012), England - unlike the European kingdoms bound by land to other countries, is particular in its ability to imagine itself as Edenic, precisely because it is an island, and its status as an island, surrounded and enclosed by water, corresponds metaphorically with the medieval *hortus conclusus*, or enclosed garden encircled by hedges. To exemplify the garden's meanings in England during the early modern period, the author has evidenced the *political* garden, the *untended* garden, the *corporeal* garden, the *colonial* garden, and the *revolutionary* garden. These forms of the garden provide a way "to read" across the geographic and scientific discourses that framed the political, cultural and literary spheres in the English Renaissance.The garden became a profoundly *political* site, invoked by people from opposing political positions and from varying social-economic standards.In the second half of the 16-th century, aristocratic estate gardens were cultivated as idealized spaces, reflecting the desire to re-create the biblical Garden of Eden or the mythical Golden Age.This desire inspired new ways in using the garden, both as a physical place and as a mental construct, to enact political and personal aspirations and to map the body and the nation and eventually the expanding world. During this period, garden design changed radically from

spaces sacred to secular, and from the intimate medieval *loci amoeni* (delightful places) to the expansive estate garden, consisting of highly theatrical formal areas and more natural (though carefully planned) parks.The conversion of monasteries to aristocratic homes in the 16-th century transformed garden style from a medieval conceptualization of enclosed private space into a *locus* of cultural and artistic display. Simultaneously, beginning in the late 16-th century and throughout the 17-th century, the imaginary Paradise underwent a process of change, due especially to the environmental degradation, dearth and malnutrition that England suffered. As the 17-th century progressed, the interest in cultivating the Garden of Eden spread from the aristocracy to the educated middle class and eventually became a republican political ideal for radical Puritan groups. In the 18-th and 19-th centuries the garden was frequently employed as a symbol of Eden before the Fall, in literature for both adults and children, following the tradition of Milton.As the original Garden of Eden was traditionally held to contain all the beneficial seeds created by God, the introduction of so many new plants in the 16-th and 17-th centuries allowed early moderns to imagine they were re-creating England as paradise, with its infinite variety of choicest plants.In an effort to build an Eden, the English and the Europeans began systematizing the cultivation of foreign and indigenous flora by constructing botanical gardens, which were most often attached to universities.Whereas the pleasure gardens had been the fashion in the 16-th and early 17-th centuries, the botanical garden increasingly became the new vogue, as Bacon envisions for his *House of Solomon* in the *New Atlantic*, published in 1627, the same time period that Oxford University plants the first botanical garden in England. (Francis Bacon*, Francis Bacon*, ed. Brian Vickers, Oxford University Press, 1996). As modern subjects, we tend to think of the past as pristine, perhaps an effect of our own Edenic nostalgia, yet Renaissance England had many ecological problems: air pollution from the increased use of coal, water pollution from an open sewage system, deforestation, and agricultural dearth resulting from war and cold weather. Gardens become a remedy in the national imaginary for the realities of life in the 16-th and 17-th century England, which was becoming increasingly urbanized and polluted. In 1657, William Coles saw the botanical garden as a way to restore the fallen world to a new Eden. *(Adam in Eden: or Natures Paradise. The History of Plants, Fruits, Herbs and Flowers*. London: J.Streater for Nathaniel Brooke, 1657). David E. Cooper, in his work, *A Phylosophy of Gardens*, (2006) considers that while gardens have such meanings as –expressive, symptomatic, depictive and so on –in many different modes, there is such a thing as ”the meaning of the Garden”. As an ”epiphany” of a certain relation between human creative activity and ” the mysterious ground” of the world in which human beings act, the Garden is peculiarly ”appropriate” to this relation of co-dependence: it has this relation as its meaning.The Garden exemplifies a co-dependence between human endeavour and the natural world, it is an epiphany of man’s relationship to mystery.

CONCLUSIONS

In the early modern period, the garden was important in terms of political and philosophical ideologies because the image of the Eden, the ”imaginary paradise”, offers the possibility of redemption and restoration.The mythical, perpetual garden only exists textually and culturally, its eternity lasting more assuredly in letters than in soil. The garden is a space imagined as removed from the harsh realities of the outside environment in which weather, wars, diseases constantly threaten human existence. Imbued with religious significance, the garden –always a synecdoche for Eden – offers the possibility of reparation for personal sins and societal ills. Due to its cyclical nature, the garden always suggests the opportunity for regeneration. This recuperative dimension of the garden explains and enables many of the metaphors that the people applied to their daily lives and to their identity as a national body.While the garden is indeed a sanctuary, it is temporary and must ultimately be left behind, once again invoking the idea of Adam and Eve leaving of Eden. Garden represents the idyllic setting, the sanctuary where healing can take place, and the lost Eden, recoverable only in memory.

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