



Gardens & Landscapes of Portugal

Book Reviews

COX, Madison, CHIVERS, Ruth and MUSGRAVE, Toby,
The Gardener's Garden, London: Phaidon Press, 2014

Reviewed by Isabel Soares de Albergaria

First, some figures: the book weighs 3.75 Kgs, is 33x28x5 cm and comprises 472 pages with around 1460 images, identifying over 270 gardens across 5 continents and 43 countries. We can literally say it is a heavy book!

The *Gardener's Garden* was born out of a primordial act: that of observation. Due to its contemplative nature, the act of observing appears contradictory to action. And in reality, if we pay close attention to its meaning, we find that the radical separation between the subject and the object which takes place during observation has great repercussions at the level of conception and design of gardens. Only the awareness of the irreducible dimension of subjectivity in relation with the material object, external and uncommunicable, has allowed us to overcome the archaic sentiment about nature, in which Man and nature participate in the same cosmos. The symbolic moment that triggered this new experience with nature is the contemplation of Mount Ventoux by Petrarca. In fact, the conscience of the transcendence of the spectacle occurs in the observer's introspective moment.

And, to some extent, we can also regard the moment that triggered this team of specialists in garden writing, designers and horticulture experts to produce a list of approximately 270 of the best gardens in the world, as the result of introspection, at which they must have arrived after much observation. The creation of such a list, which gathers and catalogues from a vast universe, invariably presupposes subjectivity - as it happens every time a collection is made. The same subjectivity that allowed Petrarca, from the top of mount Ventoux, to single out a portion of the scenery, which acquired to him a particular and unique aesthetic value. This condition of subjectivity is unequivocally stated in the title of the book: the gardener's garden. Actually, the use of a possessive pronoun between the subject- the gardener- and the object- the garden- highlights the subjectivity of the choice. And for that reason, there will always be those who find reasons to argue and disagree with the selection made.

For my part, I find a few. But allow me to first proceed to a more detailed exposition of the selection made in the book. The order in which gardens are presented regards geography, starting with Australia and then spanning the globe from east to west, with internal sections that group countries according to large regions. Within each country, gardens are listed from northwest to southeast, although this rule was not always strictly applied. In addition, the selection made was an attempt to overcome all other barriers,

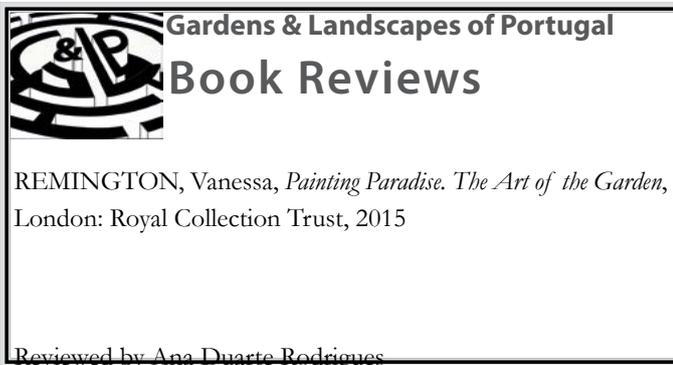
such as size, antiquity, or typology. Large public parks are presented side by side with small and intimate private spaces; historical gardens are found alongside ultra-modern projects; and typologies as different as formal, landscaped, botanical, tropical, alpine or Mediterranean gardens are presented together. In this screening, that intended to be equitable, one cannot help but notice the prevalence of modern gardens created during the 20th and 21st centuries (66% of the total). Of those, 20% correspond to creations of the 21st century. Such preference attests to the intention expressed by the publisher, to provide a plethora of information to those searching for inspiration to design gardens, in addition to the book's value as a visitor's guide.

To attain these two main objectives, the approach taken by the eleven specialist and twenty-three writers who sign the texts was to condense information in a concise table for each garden, including the identification of the author or authors, time of design and construction, geographical area, climate characteristics and key words. The table also contains a short text with the description and history of the garden, in addition to the images' captions.

Despite the efforts to systematize information, the project is carried out with a comprehensive perspective, accomplishing an accumulation of unities that lack a structuring overarching framework. Perhaps due to that reason, the criteria employed in the selection of gardens are not very clear, giving a sense that the choice was somewhat random or biased. In fact, how to justify such a high number of British (53) and American (55) gardens, representing 40% of the total, compared to such a small number of gardens from South America (7), Africa (10) or even from some European countries with a significant landscape tradition, such as Belgium and Denmark (3 each), and Switzerland, Austria, Poland and the Check Republic, each of them with just one garden listed?

In relative terms, Portugal is well represented with five gardens listed. However, I personally felt the absence of, at least, the Monserrate garden, in Sintra, as well as the Gulbenkian gardens in Lisbon. As to the gardens that were selected- Serralves Park, in Oporto; Quinta da Regaleira, in Sintra; Palácio dos Marqueses de Fronteira Garden, in Lisbon; Terra Nostra Park, in S.Miguel island, and Quinta do Palheiro-Ferreiro, in Madeira island - I cannot but salute and congratulate the authors for such a well-deserved distinction.

I started this note by addressing the physical aspects of the book. I could not finish it without referring to its visual and aesthetic elements. A very positive note is the marvelous cover in salmon-colored fabric with a floral motif, conceived by Julie Harding. The design by Hans Stofregen and layout by Studio Chehadé follow a conventional and balanced approach, where colorful images abound, human presence is rigorously excluded and where accrochage is at times excessively strident in color. A well-balanced account among panoramic views and close-ups covers the different perspectives of the gardens, but the absence of drawings and layouts reveals that a generalist audience is the target of the book.



on the difference between a maze and a labyrinth or establishes judicious connections between gardening, art of gardens' literature and decorative arts inspired by gardens. The book is also precious for the highlights it gives on the circulation of art of gardens' books in England. For example, Petrus de Crescenzi's *Ruralia Commoda* (from the beginning of the fourteenth-century) belonged to Henry VIII, showing that it is not the originality of Crescenzi but the popularity of his work that explains its success in the Early Modern period. It also includes important information on English garden manuals such as Thomas Hyll's *The Profitable arte of gardening* (1568), and *The Gardener's Labyrinth* (1577), Leonard Mascall's *Booke of the arte and manner how to plante and graffe all sorts of trees* (c. 1592). Parallel to this, it enhances the impact of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (especially the illustrated modern editions) and Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499) on art of gardens.

From Leonardo da Vinci's drawings to herbals, books on botany and various illustrations of plants and flowers, Remington's exhibition and book clearly show the development of a more pictorial method of representing natural features.

Besides the many contributions of Remington's book for gardening knowledge, the most relevant is the perspicacity within the transition from the landscape to the horticultural garden. The English garden has always been understood as the landscape garden, following the "natural" style opposed to the French formal garden. Remington presents the nineteenth century English garden as the horticultural garden. Inside this main trend one finds the *gardenesque* style. It is more difficult to accept the picturesque as a small chapter of the landscape garden when it was a central concept of aesthetical discussion on the history of the modern taste of gardening, along with the concepts of beautiful and sublime.

The chapter on the horticultural garden is the most compelling. There the monarchs appear as a bourgeois family and the English garden the citizen's garden. Through Remington's vision of art of garden history, horticultural knowledge aims to reach high moral standards.

The first question one asks when visits the exhibition *Painting Paradise. The Art of the Garden* held at the Queen's Gallery between March and October 2015 is that if this could be made somewhere else. Does it exist anywhere outside England enough paintings prints, drawings, books, manuscripts, tapestries, vases and other products of decorative arts and some artifacts such as sundial, ash, steel and beech to tell a history of gardens? The British Royal Collection made throughout history with gifts to British monarchs and the Royal family, but mostly by their own purchases is outstanding. The richly illustrated book that goes with the exhibition shows these works of art and artifacts on gardens and adds insight essays on History of Gardens.

Vanessa Remington who was already rewarded in 2012 for another book, is the curator of the exhibition as well as the author of most of the catalogue. Her expertise in miniatures explains that she has chosen as the exhibition's flagship a miniature by Isaac Oliver (c. 1565-1617) entitled *A young man seated under a tree* (c. 1590-95) which shows the simple pleasure of resting under a tree in a garden.

The foreword by Sir Roy Strong adds prestigious to Remington's work and highlights the intrinsic connection between gardens and power by pointing out the action and contribution some Kings and Queens of England had to gather the collection. The book is divided into eight chapters that follow the eight nucleus of the exhibition: Paradise; The sacred garden; The Renaissance garden; The Botanic garden; The Baroque garden; The Landscape garden; The Horticultural garden; and the garden inside (covering many decorative art objects inspired by garden motifs). After pointing out the interlaced concepts of garden and paradise, Remington provides an insight history of gardens from medieval times until the nineteenth century through a wise selection of three hundred illustrations, plans, maps and surveys that readers will not easily find in any other book of works of art and artifacts of the Royal Collection. Furthermore, an appendix provides illustrations and detailed identifications of all the works shown at the exhibition. The design of the book, following the design of the exhibition, is gorgeous and appealing.

For the serious scholar, as well as for the public in general, this is not one more interesting book on art of gardens. This is a book that looks at the subject from a unique perspective and makes important arguments for the interchange between the Persian garden and European gardens and gives clear explanations



MICHELS, Volker (ed.), *Hermann Hesse. Freude am Garten. Betrachtungen, Gedichte und Fotografien. Mit farbigen Aquarellen des Dichters.* Insel Verlag, Berlin, 2012

Notes from an ongoing reading, Isabel Lopes Cardoso

Being half-German, although with little practice in my birth German mother country, I observe the importance the garden has in the German citizen daily-life. And when we say garden, we can say as well nature, as the former one stands out the second. The lambda citizen who holds a garden, takes care of him with love, spends time and energy on him and with him. He is proud of his garden, and enjoys to share and to offer what comes from there. To get into a bookshop for general public in a medium city such as Bayreuth (a place of Wagner's music cult) is, under this perspective, an elucidative experience. Dozens of journals and publications in the limelight that share knowledge with the reader, give tips and talk on what is essential in this relationship of the German citizen with his garden: the *Freude am Garten*.

Freude am Garten (or the pleasure in and with the garden) is also the title of a texts' collection by the German-Swiss writer Hermann Hesse (1877-1962), that I found in that same bookshop, together with the former publications. Volker Michels, who coordinates this re-edition (the first edition dates from 1992), recalls the Hesse's cartoon by the German newspaper *Der Spiegel*, in 1958: a kind of garden-dwarf in the middle of the literature Nobel prizes. After the literature Nobel Prize of 1949 been assigned, this cartoon would stand that Hesse would be more read and known in foreign lands than in his own country. In Germany, scholars and journalists considered by then that a writer or anyone who devoted part of his time and of his writing to his garden was naive, or reactionary, or someone who was evading from real life. Nevertheless, both the texts on gardens and the texts on politics and culture he published in more than sixty journals and magazines deny this picture. Published since then in anthologies, these texts show a man aware of the historic time where he lives in and his profound repugnance towards the prepotency of the Wilhelmine imperial epoch. They also clear up his critical position regarding the derangement of the ongoing Industrialization and of the uncritical consumption society that was built all along the process. The I and II World Wars would become calamitous confirmations of his foresees.

The success of his first novel, *Peter Camenzind* (1903), brings Hermann Hesse the possibility of living from writing. Already married and following his novel's hero, in 1904 he chooses an alternative way of life, matching his writing practice with his living practice. He moves from Basel to a small village with three hundred inhabitants, Gaienhofen, near the lake Bodensee. Here, he searches to live under the Tolstoi, Thoreau and William Morris' ideals: away from the city and in an intimate relationship with nature. Simplicity, self-sufficiency, autonomy from the innumerable

manacles and alienations of the consumption society are the leit-motive which supervise his option. The first and also unique garden that Hesse has cultivated from root, appears here, in 1907 (later, in Bern or Montagnola, he would only modify the gardens of the houses where he lived). Between 1907 and 1912, he cultivates a self-sustainable garden, with berry fruits, vegetables and more than thirty fruit trees, in the middle of numerous flower boxes. Indeed, Hesse had a particular crush for colors and scents, which dictated his plants' choice. Rebuilt under Hesse's plans, it is possible today to visit and discover this garden, and even find, in the southern part, a historical reconstitution of traditional boxes with the most ancient species found in situ.

The compilation *Freude am Garten* opens with "Im Garten" (In the garden), a text written in 1908 which immediately reveals what seduces Hesse in the creation of a garden. To destabilize the prepotency, the authoritarianism and the feeling of superiority of the bourgeoisie, intellectuals and other delegates of the Wilhelm II's imperial politics, just by ploughing the earth with the hands. Against propaganda and prominent ostentation, he privileges a laconic way of living in practical and creative terms. To transform a small box, with some square metres of bold soil in a smiling colorful wave: what the poet brings with words, the gardener makes it with nature, wrote his contemporaneous Hugo von Hofmannsthal.

Following Michels, this small space of freedom which the garden idyll represents both in Hesses's life and literary work, allows him to explore until the ultimate limits of his capacities what an individual can do to stand against a collective disaster: to resist through the experimentation of an educational alternative model. *Glasperlenspiel* (*The Glass Bead Game*), written between 1931 and 1942, offers a literary transposition of this educational alternative model to counter the pernicious pedagogic practices of the brown-shirts. Through this method he subverts the Nazi ideology. Parallel, during those years, and following the usual embroidery between literature and life practices, Hesse receives, advises, and financially supports hundreds of emigrants who ran away from Nazi Germany, and he steps in their favor near the Swiss police.

The lesson Hesse takes from his gardening practice is that kingdoms, dynasties, nations wither and end by fading. However, nature prevails, "such as flowers that each year return in the millenary prairies". He needs the garden to "flee the paper world", that often brings him headaches. The gardener's work is essential to him to mediate and contemplate (and here we shouldn't forget his family's history of Protestants missionaries in India). To translate *Freude am Garten* into Portuguese would be an inestimable contribute to the reflection, in Portugal, on our own relationship with nature, the garden and on the reactivation of what in the last few years we have observed all along the country: the proliferation of kitchen gardens, formal or informal. These are the gardens of the lambda Portuguese citizen. And they seem to follow precepts very similar to Hesse's. But what does differentiate them? And what do they translate about our own relationship with nature?