

Pythagorean Cosmology in *The Secret Garden*

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Abstract

Based on Pythagorean Cosmology, the thesis gives new interpretations of the image of garden in *The Secret Garden* from the perspective of time and space respectively. Garden, conveying profound meanings and combining macrocosmos and microcosmos, is one of the most important means to achieve harmony and order in infinite time and space in *The Secret Garden*.

Key words: Pythagorean cosmology; Time; Space; *The Secret Garden*

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INTRODUCTION

Frances Hodgson Burnett is one of the most famous children-story writers. Her masterpieces, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden*, hold high position in children's literature. In particular, *The Secret Garden* is known as one of the most influential and popular children's literary classics in the 20th century. This novel has been studied from many different perspectives such as aesthetic point of view, children's education, prototype theory, feminist and ecocriticist etc..

It is noted that few studies have been made concerning the image of garden itself from the perspective of Pythagorean Cosmology. There is a growing concern with the image of garden in literary works. Many critics have

centered on this image from different perspectives, got profound understanding related to western literature, and opened a new door for further study concerning various poems of garden, cultural roots corresponding to garden, and most important of all, the relative theory of philosophy.

The image of garden in *The Secret Garden* is so rich and complex in that the interpretation of it is bound to transcend over both original and classic opinions and theories of academic elders. It is necessary and valuable that the present study is to take a further step on the basis of Pythagorean Cosmology, to interpret "garden" in detail from the perspective of time and space, to probe into the correspondence and relationship resting respectively in cosmos, God, garden and man.

1. PYTHAGOREAN COSMOLOGY IN GARDEN LITERATURE

Pythagoras was the most eminent of all the ancient Philosophers. Indeed, the sect of Pythagoras, exerting great influence upon the two best known schools, the Academy of Plato and the Lyceum of Aristotle, has played a definite and important role in the development of Western philosophy.

Heninger points out that

Cosmology means the composition of the universe, how our world is put together. It comprises our beliefs about the fundamental constituents of the environment. So actually, cosmology is an analysis of ultimate reality. Many different things have at one time or another been urged as the elemental components of reality. A few of the better known include atoms, the sense data of humans, the mental impressions of humans, bundles of energy, electronic fields, ideas in the Platonic sense, numbers as defined by the Pythagoreans, and basic qualities (such as hot, cold, moist, and dry). Cosmology consists in designating the intrinsic ingredients of reality and defining the interrelations between them. (Heninger, 1974, p.6)

According to cosmology, the cosmos is dominated by a well-ordered, harmonious circular movement. It is also

a kind of perfect and limited space, which is arranged in an ordered hierarchy, ranging from the lowest to the highest. The earth rests at the center of it. Cosmology emphasized the relationship between cosmos and man, the interactions of all levels. Thus, it is natural to get the concept of the chain of being. The chain of being is an attempt to deal with the metaphysical problem. The physical realm comprised (in ascending order) stones, plants, and animals; the conceptual realm comprised (in descending order) God and the angels. And man was the nexus between them, holding the physical and the conceptual together in a single entity and providing a means of intercourse between them. Man is literally the crucial link between them.

There is no doubt that garden is the miniature of cosmos. It concerns structure, hierarchy, order, harmony, movement, motive power, time, number and other elements to form the cosmos. In this sense, cosmology is operative for deep interpretation of garden. In the garden, most of the links in the chain of being are to be found.

The elements air, water, and earth were fundamental for the garden's existence and together with fire, they were used for automata, fountains, and architectural features such as walks and mounts. Man was there both as creator and beholder. Animals were kept in aviaries or cages. Plants grew in abundance, both domestic and new exotic species that were brought back to Europe and England from newly discovered countries and continents, while metals, stones, and shells were displayed in grottoes. (Beretta, 1993, p.114)

2. TIME IN THE SECRET GARDEN

According to Pythagorean Cosmology, time of garden can be classified into visible time and invisible time. In ancient time, sundial, used to measure time, was often set in a garden. It was consisted of trees, flowers and grass. The combination of sundial and garden is meaningful. Natural garden is the miniature of the world, while sundial is the symbol of time. Generally, epigraph of the sundial in the garden draws man's attention to the transience of time and life. The sundial moves forward and the world moves forward too. As time flies, the world can not return to the former state. Similarly, the change of seasons can also be regarded as the symbol of the transience of life. There are four seasons (spring, summer, autumn, and winter) corresponding to the four ages of life (infancy, youth, manhood, and old age). Garden is often used as a place for meditation and contemplation about visible time based upon the analysis of the visible sundial and four seasons mentioned above. Admittedly, the time of garden is clear and noticeable through regular movement of sundial and obvious change of four seasons. However, time in the garden, sometimes, is invisible, because garden, as a special setting, has the invisible and great power to evoke vivid, emotionally-charged memories of past events and scenes. "Most saw

time as a regulated alteration of things bringing sorrow and joy in turn." (Heninger, 1974, p.220)

"Time", concrete and abstract concept, is a common and deep-going theme in garden literature. "The point to note is that time is a cosmos composed of days, seasons, and years; but at each level of articulation within this cosmos, the same pattern persists." (Heninger, 1974, p.222) Time as a destroyer and preserver often makes a show of its destructive and collective force in garden literature. The change of garden along with time always contains far-reaching meanings beyond simple and visible images. The secret garden is not the exception. As a destroyer and preserver, time more or less plays an important role in *The Secret Garden*. In the first place, time's destructive force is closely related to the destructive power of disease and accident in *The Secret Garden*, which reveals vividly the theme of decay and death. The death of Mary's parents and the fall of Mrs Craven show the great power of the destructive time. The protagonist, Mary, also suffers terrible disease in the beginning of the novel. She is depicted as ugly, ill-tempered and viciously demanding. The only pleasure of Mary is play-gardening. She sits beneath a tree and idly places and cuts flowers in mounds of sand. When Mary moves to Misselthwaite Manor, the situation is not improved. She is in a state of decay, physically and spiritually. Colin believes that he is dying after the death of his mother. He has been in the confusion about the absence of his existence and identity for a long time. To some extent, he is in a state of madness and death. In this sense, time shows its destructive force in the intentional depiction of decay, death and madness. In the second place, the secret garden is a setting filled with magic power which enables Mary and Colin to communicate with some kind of divine spirit. In this way, positive thinking is extolled in the garden. Mary and Colin cure themselves through this kind of magical thinking and change their fortunes. Thus, the destructive force of time upon the two children is challenged owing to the function of garden.

3. SPACE IN THE SECRET GARDEN

Space is an essential element in Pythagorean Cosmology. Traditionally, space is divided into three levels in terms of the original understanding: space of god, space of nature and space of man. Garden has the function to harmonize the three levels of space in this marvelous setting for it is the mixture and symbol of the world of god, the world of nature and the world of man. Taking it by and large, space of garden may be separated into "garden within" and "garden external". Garden within means the overall arrangement in the garden and interconnection of house and garden. The secret garden is a bridge linking the nature and the human world, especially the world of children. In this novel, it combines the nature and

Misselthwaite manor together. Garden external means that garden, as an external landscape, relates to other external landscapes or the outside world. The archetype of garden, Garden of Eden is the original type of all the gardens in the world. Garden of Eden is closely linked with its external landscapes—other landscapes in the heaven and the earth. In *The Secret Garden*, The fall of Mrs Craven implies the fall of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. It suggests that human beings are controlled and destroyed by the destructive power of time. In the secret garden, children feel the existence of God and can be cultivated some kind of divine spirit. Mary and Colin gradually learn to communicate with the magic power in the secret garden. That is to say, they learn to communicate with God. The secret garden is a paradise of innocence and ideality for Mary and Dicken. They have become New Adam and Eve because of nest-building in the secret garden, the divine space, and to some extent they return to the Garden of Eden. In this way, they can challenge the destructive force of time, get rid of the devastating disease and refresh themselves.

It is noted that the common garden is generally composed of trees, flowers, water, stones, soils, which are natural things and exist as an essential part of nature. Garden, as a work of art rather than the copy of the natural landscape, has typical features of human inspiration. It is the wonderful creation of human beings and shares some similarities with the human body. Grass, trees and flowers correspond to human hair and skin. Soil and stone stand for flesh and bone. Water represents blood. The scent of garden indicates the breath of man. Scent is indispensable in a garden, for scent is nature's most direct way of hailing her human friends. Similarly, Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. The spatial representation of the secret garden is the body representation of children. In *The Secret Garden*, Mary suffers terrible disease in the beginning of the novel. When she moves to Misselthwaite Manor she becomes intensely curious about the secret garden and determines to find it. The curiosity, together with the

vigorous exercise she takes on the moor, begins to have an extremely positive effect upon Mary. Aided by Ben and a robin in the secret garden, Mary becomes less sickly and less foul-tempered. Colin, the dying poor boy, begins to experience his magnificent formation journey aided by Mary and the function of garden. Sitting in his wheelchair, he leaves the suffocating room to the secret garden with Mary and Dicken. Colin stands up for the first time in a gorgeous afternoon and walks several steps by himself. Then, he plants roses in the secret garden. From then on, Colin looks after the roses and exercises himself day by day. He recovers himself in body and spirit finally and recognizes his identities: a healthy boy and the successor of Misselthwaite Manor. Apparently, the destructive force of time is defeated through the body change of Mary and Colin in the divine and magic garden.

CONCLUSION

“The significance of the garden elements in literature may lie ultimately in their hidden curriculum—that is, in the implicit and probably unintended messages of cultural or ideological significance that they convey.” (Waters, 1986, p.305) This preliminary study has concentrated on garden from the perspective of time and space stemming from Pythagorean Cosmology. Profound meanings and sources lie in the simple and ordinary garden image. Great value of garden takes up immeasurable percentage in the interpretation of the secret garden. Garden, conveying rich content, is one of the most important means to achieve harmony and order in *The Secret Garden*.

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