

# Gardens of Madeira—Gardens of the World



Gardens of Madeira—Gardens of the World:  
Contemporary Approaches

Edited by

José Eduardo Franco, Ana Cristina da Costa Gomes  
and Beata Elzbieta Cieszyńska

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P U B L I S H I N G

Gardens of Madeira—Gardens of the World: Contemporary Approaches,  
Edited by José Eduardo Franco, Ana Cristina da Costa Gomes and Beata Elzbieta Cieszyńska

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Fig. 17.1 Map of Skansen (Stockholm, Sweden) illustrated by Jane Bark; by permission of Stiftelsen Skansen, S-11593 Stockholm, Sweden.

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# INTRODUCTION

## CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO GARDEN(S) OF THE WORLD

BEATA ELZBIETA CIESZYNSKA<sup>1</sup>  
AND JOSÉ EDUARDO FRANCO<sup>2</sup>

If, in various ways, gardens continue to evoke the human condition<sup>3</sup>, what would be essential for their present day cultural contexts and perspectives? Which out of so many aspects of cultural readings of gardens in the past would conform to today's vitality? And, on the other hand, which contemporary reading would be the very new and genuine one, underlining the determining factors of post-Modern discourses on gardens and following their practices? Such questions address an extremely vast range of ideas and practices in the history and mythology of human beings who from the very beginning became deeply marked by the spatial and temporal dimensions of gardens and these still accompany our cultural changes and challenges.

The importance of the practice and theory of gardens in today's world seems to be well recognized, as gardens may still provide interesting, fresh and convenient schemes for anthropological, cultural and social aspects of historical and contemporary societies.<sup>4</sup> It seems as though part of the process of reading both the self and the other expresses itself through references to gardening patterns. There already exists a constantly updated and expanding bibliography of topics on gardens and gardening that stretches far beyond the capacity of the research issues to be presently undertaken and discussed. Even a rapid glance at such literature on gardens reveals that besides the new cultural and socio-cultural challenges that the idea of gardens offers to readers today, we are still puzzled by past searches, attempting again and again to reinterpret old gardens and texts on gardens from the perspective and through the prism of both new methods and/or experiences. We have to admit that general knowledge on any literary or real garden in the world increases rapidly due to the number of publications, such as collections of texts referring to or describing and interpreting

gardens, as well as countless guide-based publications containing phrases such as: “garden(s) in...”/garden(s) of... etc. One could certainly risk the assessment that the number of such publications has at least tripled in the last decade. The expansion of these works allows us to jump to the conclusion that we are still on our quest to discover the essence of national or cultural dimensions of the gardens we want to name and describe, and that we are still somehow searching for the “Great Garden Narratives”... Such narratives, in the case of gardens, continue to be the tempting idea of the world which itself is read as a garden, having to reconstruct the utopian parameters of the idea of paradise.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, on the one hand, we lean towards a post-modern variety of non-hierarchical fragmented voices and discourses, while on the other we bring together theories and practices about gardens and gardening, thus proving the potential of gardens to inspire such narratives.

The book *Gardens of Madeira - Gardens of the World. Contemporary Approaches* aims to contribute to the world-wide range of discussions proposing the encounter of interpretations of the idea of garden in historical and present-day societies joining different methods, points of view, research areas and perspectives. The latter are introduced by the titles of its four parts: “Madeira: A Garden in the Sea?”, “Gardens as Temporal and Spatial Categories. Cultural and Literary Approaches”, “Gardens as an Expression. Socio-cultural Perspectives” and “Re-Creating the Archetypal Garden – Discourses and Practices”. As the contents reveal, the book is meant to present some aspects of gardens as cultural and social expressions, frequently highlighting Luso-centric perspectives, starting with the complex issue of the Island of Madeira working as a kind of a microcosm towards the later analyzed macrocosm(s). Departing from the readings of Madeira (never before so profoundly explored), the book then enters into the various macro scales of national, cultural and social perspectives playing with the idea of the “garden(s) of the world”.

The volume displays contemporary tendencies in calling upon the idea of gardens. One of its lines consists of looking at the historical (and sometimes surprisingly modern) searches of communities, nations, cultures, societies, and authorities to find their separate, specific voice in the history and culture expressed through the real or imaginary garden. On the other hand, it seeks to demonstrate various examples of the contemporary treatment of the idea of gardens, according to the newest understanding of social and cultural worlds, including projects dealing with the future of civilisation.

A reader interested in studying European nationalities, above all in its literary issues, will find such contributions in almost all the thematic chap-

ters of the book in the studies of nationalities through their various relationships with the theory or practice of gardens. The discourses and practices which are presented in the book show, on the one hand, the goals already achieved (e. g. the analysis of Madeira's national aspirations, gardening projects being carried out etc), on the other hand pointing out the new challenges that society and the environment bring today. Thus the base for the collection of studies presented here becomes the very unique crossings of national, cultural and social patterns of referring to the idea of gardens in historical and present day challenges. Another interesting issue in the book is that of the category of popular culture of gardens as this enters into specific ideological constellations.

The book *Gardens of Madeira - Gardens of the World. Contemporary approaches* refers to the vital necessity of recognising contacts and comparisons in reading the other and self-defining through the references to the idea and practice of gardens. According to the studies of this book gardens still play an important role in the research perspectives on reading the other seen as the necessary component of self defining<sup>6</sup>. It is very obvious in the few articles dedicated to reading Madeira in such cultures as the British, Italian or Slavonic. It may be seen in many other examples, the most obvious being in the Luso-centric issues, such as in Lusitanian culture (Aurora Carapinha) and literary models (Annabela Rita). Many levels of interpretations of specific aspects of gardens in national or cultural dimension are contained also in other chapters of the book, (Gardens and Slavic Cultures – Beata Elzbieta Cieszyńska, Maria Kistereva and Olga A. Saprykina – Gardens of Russia, Chinese gardens – Daniel Kwok, African Gardens – Muanamosi Matumona, etc.).

As mentioned above, the present book starts with examining Madeira, the imagined and real island with complex garden and island connotations. The title of this chapter: *Madeira: A Garden in the Sea?*, refers to the famous publicity film of Cook from the year 1931, questioning this simple and obvious meaning and consequences. When that short (eight minutes long) documentary *Madeira: A Garden in the Sea*<sup>7</sup> came out in 1931, it worked with many popular and archetypal ideas and it referred to gardens that had been cultivated around that small Atlantic isle for centuries. The film was supposed to attract British and American tourists, and at the same time to draw Madeira's history and space to their points of view. Playing with stereotypes, the film showed well the scale of European involvement in the process of "Reading Madeira". That part of the book offers some insights into the images of Madeira as a garden in the sea through its historical course, events etc., and displays to the readers various European cultures, including the Eastern parts of contemporary united Europe, dem-

onstrating their views in conjunction regarding the Isle of Madeira or/and gardens themselves.

The part *Madeira: A Garden in the Sea?*, as does the book itself, opens with José Eduardo Franco's (University of Lisbon) article: "Madeira, The Myth of the Garden-Island. A Culture of Regionality or of Imperfect Nationality". This offers a complex discourse on the roots, traditions and cultural and/or national roles played by the above mentioned idea of "Madeira as a Garden in the Sea"<sup>8</sup>. This chapter contains the author's original model of the basis for a successful creation of national identity and he explains his view regarding the incompleteness of such patterns in the case of this island.

The next chapters combine various aspects of Madeira's influences and receptions of its "horticultural condition", starting with English literature, which, for various mythical and historical reasons frequently identified the island as part of her very own cultural and material heredity. In her study: "Madeira and its Gardens in English Literature", Marie-Louise Egbert shows the evidence of these English attachments, above all in the travel writing throughout the centuries. The next chapter: "Madeira Island, Real and Imaginary Garden in Italian Literature" by Mariagrazia Russo (University of Viterbo) takes readers back to the Mediterranean sources of the literary appearances of Madeira. It draws a detailed and poetical picture of the Island from its mythical imaginary sources to its modern touristic delights.

The Eastern, Central and South Eastern parts of Europe are recalled in the chapter: "Madeira and the Idea of Garden in Polish and Other Slavic Cultures: an Analytical Perspective of Genesis and Evolution" by Beata Elzbieta Cieszyńska (University of Lisbon). Examining such determinants in Slavic countries the above-mentioned study combines two perspectives: looking at Madeira and elaborating the idea of garden itself. The last chapter is devoted to the questioning of the identity of Madeira and also introduces the second part of the book's study, entitled: *Gardens as Temporal and Spatial Categories. Literary and Cultural Approaches*. Its two initial chapters concentrate on the search for determinants and roles played by gardens in Portuguese culture and literature, combining literary interpretations with aspects of the History of Ideas. The first study "About the Garden's Essence in Lusitanian culture" by Aurora Carapinha from the University of Evora, is dedicated to the search for determinants and roles played by gardens in Classical Portuguese culture and literature, whereas the second one, "Two models of Reading Gardens in Portuguese Literature and Culture" by Annabela Rita (University of Lisbon), deals with two different literary works - one from the Romanticism and the other a con-

temporary one. This last chapter not only introduces such valuable Portuguese texts on gardens to the general public<sup>9</sup> but it also demonstrates through them the paths of Portuguese history and literature in a national, European and universal context.<sup>10</sup>

The next chapter returns to a theme which still puzzles us today<sup>11</sup>, namely that of France ruled by Louis XIV and this receives an interpretation through the idea of gardens. In her study: “Two Policies, Two Aspects of Nature: Conquest and Stewardship in French Formal Gardens”, Chandra Mukerji shows the presence of gardens as essential to the modern growth of the French state through both stewardship seen as a political philosophy and territorial politics.

With the next three chapters appears the focus on the question about the essential aspects of those cultures under analysis when it comes to gardens, as in “Gardens of Russia” by Maria Kistereva and Olga K. Saprykina (University of Lomonosow, Russia), “*Tingyuan* 庭园: Ideas of Civility in the Chinese Classical Garden”<sup>12</sup>, presented by Daniel Y. Kwok (Hawaii University), and “African Gardens as a Result of Modernity” written by Muanamosi Matumona.

The first chapter of that group outlines the typical and peculiar Russian features in the history of parks and gardens, concluding with the Soviet phenomenon of the art of gardening. It also dwells on some factors determining the idea of gardens in the Slavic countries, as remarked in the above-mentioned chapter by Beata Elzbieta Cieszyńska. The second study focuses on explaining the specific participating time/space relation in the classical Chinese gardens. In this chapter the compound word *tingyuan* appears as the most complete expression of the Chinese conception of the garden as a place of interrelated structures and natural elements. The author also points out the modern adaptation of classic *tingyuan* motifs, principles and aspects. The third study demonstrates through the idea of gardens the African process of transformation from tradition to the Modernity, underlining the particular dimension of the last term for that continent. The chapter includes a discussion of the idea of the Biblical Eden as situated in Africa, the relationship between Nature and Culture according to the African tradition and the strong role of the post colonial issues seen in both influences of the Western ideas of gardens and in the particular African attempt of a negative self-defiance through the belief: “our culture is not of gardens”.

The next part of the book is dedicated to various social aspects of gardening and is entitled: *Gardens as an Expression. Sociocultural Perspectives*. The basis for such studies is provided by three different types of communities: exclusive, immigrant, popular. In the first chapter José

António Ferrer Benimeli, from the University of Saragossa, Spain, discusses the concept of a 'masonic garden' focused on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century places and roles of the "Masonic gardens" in both freemasonry's philosophy and architecture. The symbology of the expression of freemasonry communities and its international character are revealed in the fact of crossing tendencies, that is various micro cosmos (concrete masonic gardens) and the universal component of the ideology and activity of the European masonry expressed through the gardens surrounding their temples.

As the chapter on freemasonry shows, in fact, gardens matter in a specific exclusive community at a chosen historical period, Teresa Pinheiro, from Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany, focuses on the popular culture of gardening in Germany, and looks at both perspectives – the history and present-day outcomes. In her study: "The German *Schrebergärten*. A Socio-cultural Analysis" Pinheiro presents some incarnations of the social phenomenon of allotment garden(ing) in German culture in the historical changes that led to questions about its future roles in the social space and collective memory of the re-united Germany.<sup>13</sup>

Another aspect of cultural and social expression through gardening is introduced in the chapter: "The Garden as an Extension of the Self-in-the-World – a Luso-American sample" by Onésimo Teotónio Almeida. This chapter resembles some of the ideas essential for the above mentioned studies by Aurora Carapinha and Annabela Rita, but this time readers may observe the Portuguese in course of cultural fusion. From the position of a participating observer the author asks about the rules of cultural assimilation and self-preservation, seeking the basic differences between American and Luso-American gardens. This author shows ways of organizing spaces in the gardens of various Portugal-based immigrant communities in USA, evidencing their necessity to preserve cultural roots in the inevitable process of becoming accustomed to the new cultural space and the realization of the "American dream" in its "Lusitanian" dimension.

The last part of the analysis presented in *Gardens of Madeira - Gardens of the World. Contemporary Approaches* is entitled: *Re-Creating the Archetypal Garden – Discourses and Practices*, and this joins both theoretic and practical aspects of gardens. On the one hand here we situate gardens in the context of the traditional philosophic triad "Nature – Art – Science". On the other hand, some insights are offered into present day attempts to turn the human reservoir of historical and mythological knowledge, images and assumptions into a base for the very actual and practical "garden dependent activity". This section starts with two chapters looking at human experience of gardens from a philosophical perspective. The first



of these is the theoretical reflection on “Gardens between Nature and Art” by Luis Machado de Abreu from the University of Aveiro, Portugal, and he shows gardens as half way between Nature and Art, and between utility and beauty, and as an expression of aesthetic ideas, and an ontologically transformed space of utopian ideals for life and culture. Either way, the author underlines a challenging necessity of “looking *at* nature, without forgetting to look *by means of nature*“. The second chapter of that section applies the theory of gardens to present-day environmental thought. The study by Viriato Soromenho-Marques from the University of Lisbon, entitled: “Gardens as Representation in Ecological Utopia(s)” shows the complex relationship between ecology and the concept of utopia, and discusses contemporary projects of gardens as a model for the civilization of the future.

The last mentioned two studies work also as an introduction to the topics of the three following chapters, reporting from various fields on present day efforts to call on the rich tradition of gardens and gardening in search of social and cultural platforms of encounters and crossings.<sup>14</sup> The first of these is the chapter by Roland Delbaere<sup>15</sup> entitled “Recreational Scenarios for a Re-Created Eden”. He focuses on some European projects of cultural implementation regarding key ideas for the Biblical vision of the Gardens of Paradise in gardening spaces. The second is that of Holger Höge’s from the University of Oldenburg, Germany, and is entitled “Gardens of Cognition and Feeling: Open Air Museums”. This chapter presents the concept and role of the open air museums pointing out their particular characteristics in comparison with gardens and parks. The author discusses the potential that allows the participants of the former to go even beyond the experience offered by the latter.

In order to complete the platform drawn by the book for encounters and crossings connected to gardens, the last voice belongs to a practitioner, Gill Clarke, an Intergenerational Strategy Project Manager of the Derbyshire County Council in UK. This county is currently at the forefront of intergenerational work and in 2007 launched the Derbyshire Intergenerational Strategy (DIgS) that has experienced great successes in an intergenerational community based allotment project. This short closing presentation is entitled “Grassmoor Allotment Project (GAP). An intergenerational gardening project in England”.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, with its four parts, the volume *Gardens of Madeira – Gardens of the World. Contemporary Approaches* has united some practical and theoretical dimensions of the research field under discussion. It allows its readers to join the philosophical and literary analysis dedicated to gardens in the context of the triad “Nature – Art – Science” with very concrete and

modern attempts to introduce the archetypal aspects of gardens into various social activities, such as the search for recreational spaces or inter-generational approximation.

The present work may present itself to the public as a wide-range approach to the literary, sociological and cultural representations of gardens. Being above all of interest to scholars focused on the present day search of the Humanities for re-thinking and re-constructing social and cultural spaces according to traditional and new ideas of gardens, this book might also meet the expectations of the wider public, as it proposes a fresh look at the topics undertaken and covers a wide range of areas, a broad range of interests and themes, inevitably appearing as a kind of *hortal* – if we are to apply the language of IT<sup>17</sup>. The volume refers also to vast geographical areas, starting with the very complex sample of the overseas-yet-European Island of Madeira, and then joining the exemplification material from historical and contemporary European communities (with some luso-centric accents), including examples from the less known Slavonic and Eastern European countries. Those European issues are confronted with various non-European societies such as from Africa, Asia, and both Americas.

Looking at the book's contents: "Madeira: A Garden in the Sea?", "Gardens as Temporal and Spatial Category. Cultural and Literary Approaches", "Gardens as an Expression. Socio-cultural Perspectives" and "Re-Creating the Archetypal Garden – Discourses and Practices" one might learn that through both horticultural activity and thought we still search for some traces of the traditional *topoi* of "the Book of Nature"<sup>18</sup>. The reflexions leave no doubts that the moment matters, that today's mixed up world's labyrinths in global and individual perspectives are to be re-read and re-introduced into our adjusted vision of the Other and Ourself.

If Rosario Assunto's point that "...a garden is none other than thoughts and feelings transformed into a place"<sup>19</sup> is right, this book is certainly an attempt to catch up with the contemporary colorful variety and meaningful needs for rethinking and re-living both physical and imagined gardens. Gardens evoke and express in many ways the present human condition, and - as such a process goes on - this book provides proposals for patterns to connect them to the modern and post-modern rules of self defining, reading the Other, interpreting world/national/cultural literatures, as well as to the various attempts to introduce the idea of gardens into the basic spatial and temporal aspects of contemporary communities. It also demonstrates the theoretical and practical attempts to project our "gardens' dependence" on to one of the essentials for contemporary societies which

are multicultural, urbanised, technologically equipped and dependent, but which still are keen on reading and constructing paradises as environmental and cultural spaces for both asylum and encounter.

Today discourses on gardens enter with a new force into the eternal dialogue on the relationship between Nature and Culture, Civilisation, Art and ecological and sociological perspectives. The huge advantage of these present callings upon the gardens is that the discourses from the past meet with the quests of both the Humanities and the Sciences for gardening inspirations, not only for the sake of the today's societies, but also when projecting the future of the Earth.

## Notes

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1. University of Lisbon – Center for Lusophone and European Literatures – CLEPUL, FLUL
  2. University of Lisbon - Center for Lusophone and European Literatures – CLEPUL, FLUL
  3. See, for example, the manner of discourse of Robert Pogue Harrison, *Gardens: an essay on the human condition* (Chicago/ London: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
  4. There can be no doubt that the phenomenon of gardens gained such a wide humanistic circle that become confirmed, for example, by Patrick Taylor, ed., *The Oxford companion to the garden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). On a more practical field Louisa Jones even tried to prepare the companion for visitors to any garden. See Louisa Jones, *The garden visitor's companion* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009).
  5. One may certainly make the assumption that the Eden project entered a very popular level of present day reflection, even as a guide to create the garden of Eden in a private allotment. Compare e.g. Matthew Biggs, *Gardening at Eden: and how to do it at home*, photography by Caroline Hughes, (London: Eden Project Books, 2006); for another sample applying the term in a descriptive perspective, see: Penelope Hobhouse, *In search of paradise: great gardens of the world* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2006). See also: Alan Jones and Alistair Guthrie, *Creating the Garden of Eden: engineering the world's largest greenhouse* (London: Royal Academy of Engineering, 2003).
  6. Pointing out this perspective we are above all referring to two works dealing with that self defining topic: the well established research field of phenomenology and social studies recently republished by Bernard Waldenfels, *The question of the other* (Albany, N.Y.: Bristol: State University of New York, 2007) and a fairly new collection of studies edited by Livia Mathias Simão and Jaan Valsiner, N.C. Charlotte (Eds.) *Otherness in question: Labyrinths of the self*. Information Age Pub., c2007).
  7. This publicity film is now available on the service of youtube:  
[http://www.madeirahelp.com/madeira\\_garden\\_sea\\_1931](http://www.madeirahelp.com/madeira_garden_sea_1931)

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8. From the literary field e.g. J. Edith Hutcheon presents Madeira as Eden, see: J. Edith Hutcheon, *Things Seen in Madeira* (London, 1928, p. 90), while Claude Dervenn (*Madeira*, Lisbon, p. 11) refers to Madeira as a lost paradise. In another text it is announced as the new Eden (*Madeira*, Lisbon, 1914).
  9. This tendency, together with so many others issues, is presented, for example, in the book: Michele Slung, ed., *The garden of reading: an anthology of twentieth-century short fiction about gardens and gardeners* (New York; London : Overlook Duckworth, 2005); Another tendency – showing authors in their literary relationships with gardens and nature - represents another new British Library outcome accompanying the exhibition of the year 2004. See Roger Evans, *The writer in the garden* (London : British Library, 2004).
  10. See e.g. by Isabel Carlson, compiler, *Words from the garden: a collection of beautiful poetry, prose and quotations* (Chichester: Summersdale, c2008).
  11. See the monograph by Elizabeth Hyde, *Cultivated power: flowers, culture, and politics in the reign of Louis XIV* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).
  12. Among new monographs on classical Chinese gardens. See e.g. Tianxing Yao, *Classical Chinese gardens*, translat. Kuang Peihua, Ouyang Weiping and Wang Qin (Yu Ling; Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2003). To learn about their cultural dialogues see: Yu Liu, *Seeds of a different Eden: Chinese gardening ideas and a new English aesthetic ideal* (Columbia, S.C. : University of South Carolina Press; London : c2008).
  13. The referred topic of “allotment gardening” in the recent period of transition as presented in this article is very relevant to the wider European space, as in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that German sample became frequently followed by the countries of the former “Eastern Bloc”.
  14. In the search for a wider monographic perspective on the topic that in this chapter looks at the Luso-American sample, readers may find useful the collection: Michel Conan and Jeffrey Quilter, eds., *Gardens and cultural change: a Pan-American perspective* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection; Cambridge, Mass., 2007).
  15. Among other positions, an expert of the European Counsel on matter of the cultural tourism.
  16. See: Richard Wiltshire, *Growing in the community* (London : LGA, 2008).
  17. Hortal - Horizontal portal, a portal that covers a broad range of interests and topics.
  18. The chain: World-Nature-Garden-Labyrinth - Book is still a tempting perspective inspiring various present day approach. Besides obvious re-interpretations of ancient literary texts on gardens as books of nature to be read, such as the collection by Ilva Beretta, *The world's a garden: garden poetry of the English Renaissance* (Uppsala: Coronet Books Inc, 1993) or the article of Agnieszka Maciocha, “Najważniejsza księga – topos księgi natury w czasopiśmie drugiej połowy XVIII wieku”, *Humanistic Review*, 01/2009 (Polish Culture and Society), 53-70. There also exists a tendency to focus on the garden itself, as one may observe e.g. in the following collection: Hervé Brunon, ed., *Le jardin comme*

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*labyrinthe du monde: métamorphoses d'un imaginaire de la Renaissance à nos jours*. Préface by Henri Loyrette, (Paris: PUPS, Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2008). Relationship with a human kind adding the world through its *A world in transition: humankind and nature: the green book of 'Einstein meets Magritte'*, ed. Diederik Aerts, Jan Broekaert and Willy Weyns. (Dordrecht; London : Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999). Another approach shows the school of practical interpretations of the nature to be imitated like in the following business guide: Tachi Kiuchi and Bill Shireman, *What we learned in the rainforest: business lessons from nature: innovation, growth, profit, and sustainability at 20 of the world's top companies* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, c2002).

19. Rosario Assunto, *Ontología y Teleología del Jardín*, trans. Mar García Lozano (Madrid: Tecnos, 1991), 35.



## **PART I**

### **MADEIRA: A GARDEN IN THE SEA?**

## CHAPTER ONE

# MADEIRA, MYTH OF THE GARDEN-ISLAND: CULTURE OF REGIONALITY OR OF THE IMPERFECT NATIONALITY

JOSÉ EDUARDO FRANCO<sup>1</sup>

Close and remote island  
That in the ears persists  
For the eyesight doesn't exist  
What vessel, what armada, what fleet  
Can find the way.  
—Fernando Pessoa, *Message*

### 1. Preliminary considerations

“Only in my imagination can I glimpse the things that can become real, and that is enough to raise a little the terrible interdiction.”  
—A. Breton, *Manifeste du Surréalisme*

As in Portuguese culture, Madeira, in the construction of a certain vision of its history and of its physical and human geography, developed a mythification process that allows us to sanction what we call a culture of regionality or of the imperfect nationality. Eduardo Lourenço, in the famous *Labirinto da Saudade* edited in 1978, in the context of the effort developed by some sectors of Portuguese intellectuality to rethink Portugal, psychoanalyses the Portuguese mentality and culture, concluding that these produced the conscience of an unreal image of history, of the role and mission of the Portuguese people in the world. That unreal image has afflicted us and accentuated the conscience of country-always-in-crisis in the confrontation between the perception of real smallness and the exiguous splendour of our country in contrast with the mythified glorious past and its messianic destiny that turned Portugal into a kind of “infant Jesus of the nations”<sup>2</sup>.





Fig. 1-1 Sample of one of the many gardens in Madeira Island.

In what concerns the insular reality of Madeira, we observe a similar process of mythification, which compensates in some way for the condition of insularity, of ultraperiphery and of territorial smallness. The Madeiran culture developed an ideal image of its origins, of its bright history, of its private epopee that turns Madeira, as it is sung by the voice of its folklore, the “daughter of Portugal”, the garden-island, a Portuguese jewel admired in the world.

The myth of Madeira as a garden-island is built between the contemplative enchantment of its natural environment and the idealisation of its past, its roots, of its history as a factor of identity construction and cultural distinction. We must be reminded that it is important to avoid interpreting myth as a falsification process, as Karen Armstrong warns: “We have to get rid of the fallacy that the myth is false or that it represents an inferior way of thinking – this is the fallacy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.” And the same author continues:

“We need myths that help us identify with all our life companions, but not only with those that belong to our ethnic, national or ideological tribe. We need myths that help us understand the importance of compassion that is not always regarded as sufficiently productive or effective in our rational and pragmatic world. We need myths that help us reach a spiritual attitude, see beyond the immediate demands and qualify us to try a transcendent value that challenges our solipsistic selfishness. We need myths that help us worship the earth again as sacred, instead of using it merely as a “re-

source". This is crucial, because if we do not go through some kind of spiritual revolution, which is able to keep us informed about technological skill, we won't save the planet<sup>3</sup>."

The historical elaboration of the great cultural landscapes, either national or civilisational, but also, sometimes, regional, almost always resorts to a process of mythification of the origins, of the great epic deeds, to the configuration and exaltation of a golden age and to the enhancing of a role/mission, in some cases with teleological perspectivation, in universal history. This mythification process acts as a legitimization form and as a reinforcement of the differentiation/distinction of the superiority or primacy of a given culture or identity system.

We must point out, as an example, the importance of the role carried out by the myths of the origins of the European kingdoms in the dawn of the Modern Age in favour of the affirmation process of the nationalities associated with the affirmation process of the idea of state and of the centralisation of the power in the monarch's hands<sup>4</sup>.

The debated and controversial question of the existence, or not, of a Madeiran culture that claims particular specificities, a culture that deserves an adjectivation that allows its distinction in pro-identity terms from the national culture, can gain a new analytical perspective if we focus our analytical attention on the mythification process of which Madeira was a target and how that mythification (*per se* and *per alter*) was a factor of configuration of a culture with specific traits.

As a preliminary problematisation of this brief study, a scarcely consensual question should be raised: is it legitimate to speak of a Madeiran culture? And perhaps we must first ask: what is culture? For the classical authors, culture was understood as every demand made by man in the sense of knowing himself better. More recent definitions see culture associated with the idea of civilisation, as everything man produces and perfects in the process of development of the multiple capabilities of his spirit and body and in order to adapt and dominate, through knowledge and work, the milieu to which he belongs.

In this specific sense, it certainly is legitimate to speak of the existence of a particular Madeiran cultural reality, if we understand culture as the creative expression of the life of a people that, in the face of the vicissitudes of history and a peculiar geography, knew how to adopt a *sui generis* way of "embalming existence", passing it from generation to generation. This specificity was confirmed and thought over in the *I International Congress of Madeiran Culture*, which took place in December 1990, in which that culture was analysed, developed in the frame of the 'dynamics of the Portuguese Discoveries' and which sprang fundamentally from the

Portuguese cultural tradition, “but evidencing a profound regional tendency”. Here “the mythical, the religious, the poetic, the pagan, the sensual, the Baroque, the fantastic, the contradictory” – said Fernando Dacosta – are some of those roots of the Portuguese culture. Which is not only the one of continental Portugal: it is also the cultures of Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea, Cape Verde, S. Tomé, of all places, Macau, Timor, emigrants’ colonies where the same language is spoken, where the same dreams are dreamt and where the same feelings are felt. In this sense, the same author considers that the Madeiran culture is “doubly peripheral because it is penetratingly interior and insular, where the island is the uterus, the place of conception and the statement, of departure and arrival”<sup>5</sup>.

Culture, such a polysemic concept, but here understood, however, as the substratum, that psycho-spiritual “humus” that moulds a worldview, that determines the way of looking at the place where we live, the past, what we are and the notion of future, the way of observing others and the relationships with others, with the foreign and the transcendent, the way of understanding the cosmos, basically, as Manuel Antunes writes, culture is what “makes man a man”<sup>6</sup>. A culture that basically configures an individual social psychology that, in this case, consecrates general idiosyncratic characteristics typical of insular anthropology.

The official discovery of the island by the Portuguese made way to its population by the Lusitan people, aided by other peoples of different countries, races and ethnic groups (Italian, Spanish, Arabs, African slaves, Saxons...) that, for several reasons, would inhabit these islands. Thus, as exploration and settlement continued, a *modus vivendi* gradually developed in the new insular society, marked by several habits and traditions due to miscellaneous ethnic and cultural aspects. However, the culture brought from the Portuguese metropolis prevailed, being the Christian Catholic religious creed, that all were led to profess, the unifying link of all this emerging social and cultural reality.

We used the notion of myth, in this critical study, around the process of ideographic elaboration of Madeira as a garden-island, as an operational concept to characterise the idealisation process developed either in an endogenous cultural perspective or by exogenous cultural subjects.

Madeira has been, effectively, looked at with enchantment, as stated in the accounts of foreign erudite visitors, in the voice of the people or in Madeiran intellectuality. Travellers’ narrations, travel literature, accounts, chronicles, historiographic works, novels, poetry, popular songbooks, legends and traditions, posters and documents of touristic propaganda,

official speeches and sacred eloquence constitute the documental basis from which sprouts the myth of Madeira as a garden-island.

In the line of contemporary mythocriticism and based on great reference works on the critical study of the processes of mythification of the so-called geography of the imaginary that sustains it, and among which we must refer to the classic studies by Mircea Eliade, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Gaston Bachelard, Gilbert Durant, Hans Blumenberg and, more recently, Lucian Boia, just to mention a few, we do not define myth as a process of rude falsification of reality, but precisely as an hyperbolised idealisation founded more or less strongly or more or less tenuously on a real basis. A reality background that is perceived and reinterpreted literarily, read and rebuilt in the light of certain ideographic archetypes, concepts or pre-concepts, trying reach certain ends or effects, holding, therefore, a finalising and sometimes mobilising efficacy<sup>7</sup>.

Different from the legend, the myth is an ideographic concept developed in the frame of a narrative that intends to have a certain political, cultural, moral and social effectiveness or even in terms of strategy of a certain promotion. In Madeira's case it is the promotion of a touristic product.

The mythification process is, in synthesis, a powerful form of cultural structuring and, therefore, a way of bestowing to a culture profound foundations of individual identity. In fact, the myth implants itself in the psychology of a people, germinates from its soul, shapes its mentality and determines its worldview. Besides, the presence and configuration of a mythology is a form of valorising culture and of conferring it a superior dimension, a transcendent or transcendentalised character, because, as the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski writes:

“All foundations in which mythical conscience implants itself, in its initial version or in its metaphysical extensions, are, therefore, statements of values. They can be fruitful, because they satisfy the real need of subduing the world of experience, through its comprehensive interpretation, referring it to an unconditioned being.”<sup>8</sup>

## **2. The three-dimensional process of Madeira's mythification**

The myth of Madeira as a garden-island is configured in three different levels. These influence each other in order to create a certain image of Madeira that matters to the people of Madeira in their umbilical connection to the place of birth, to the politicians and to tourism marketing agents

who have taken advantage of this view of Madeira to ‘sell’ this archipelago externally as an attractive touristic product.

The first mythification level, and the most solid, is the one which concerns the construction of an ideal image of its natural environment represented as an Edenic garden. That imagiological construction is intimately connected and, sometimes, operates concurrently with the idealisation process of its paradisiacal origins of inviolate nature.

The second level of mythification includes the definition effort and correlative exaltation of a golden age of prosperity, gold and strategic and political importance that Madeira would have enjoyed in a certain period of its history. The referential frame of this singular period is testified to by its architecture, literature and by specific civilisational elements then created<sup>9</sup>. In that apogee period, Madeira would have played a decisive role in the process of proto-globalisation of the relations between peoples and cultures, in the *opening of the world to the world* in the words of António Vieira, that the Iberian Discoveries provided, and would also have contributed in a pioneer way to the technological revolution that would become one of the most outstanding phenomena of modern and contemporary times.

The third mythification level is what we designate as Madeiran epopee. This epic narration turns the islander born in this archipelago, the worker par excellence and the people of Madeira, the stoic people – the martyrs of work – that would have transformed the wild nature of its orographically irregular land, wild and of difficult accesses, into a humanised garden and one arranged by the force of intense, arduous work, watered from sunrise to sunset with the face’s sweat during a hard day’s work.

In a certain way, the mythical outline is redrawn analogously to the one that appears in the classic mythical narratives about origins. We can even identify some echo of the mythical background of the genesic narrative of the Bible. There, Paradise gives way to purgatory or to the hell of its extradition having as punishment arduous work, from which man will extract his day-to-day bread by the sweat of his brow. But, at the same time, from that purgatory, from that diligent work, rises a new creation, a new land transformed by human hand that allows it to be inhabited, humanised and possessed by man. It is a kind of copy of the myth of the lost Paradise and of its “structure of meaning” that explains individual and collective existence in the scope of space-time co-ordinates of human history<sup>10</sup>.

Of this mythical three-dimensional view exudes the final picture of Madeira idealised in an intercourse between two extreme levels: the natural garden, wild, chiselled by divine creation or by nature, and the humanised garden, tamed nature, capable of welcoming and of being inhabited

by man. The profile of the inhabitants of Madeira is glorified as the worker par excellence and he is attributed, due to his cultural worldview analysed here, a role of transformist subject/agent in the world. An image of prestige, a symbol that would have contributed to affirm the name of Madeira throughout the world.

### **3. Idealisation of Madeira's natural environment**

#### **3.1 Madeira in the context of the mythical islands**

The idealised perception of the natural environment of the archipelago of Madeira, although we are focusing on the main island that gave its name to this group of islands, goes back to the time of its discovery. Madeira's location was on the route to the Fortunate Isles (along with the Canaries, Cape Verde and Azores Islands), to the mythical islands, to the paradisiacal islands that were supposedly located somewhere in the great ocean beyond the Columns of Hercules<sup>11</sup>. We are referring to the famous islands imagined and sung by the classics and re-enchanted by the medievalists as islands wrapped in mystery and situated, therefore, beyond the known world in the vast unknown ocean.

Possessing the classic legacy and transporting the medieval imaginary recycled by Christianity and populated by the archetypes inherent to the idea of lost Paradise and to the desire of its guest, and to the possibility of a return to the primigenial origins of creation, Europe of the late Middle Ages with Portugal as its pioneer begins to build the era of proto-globalisation through the maritime journeys of discovery.

This oneiric horizon that marked the explorers' imaginary geography was a factor of great importance in mobilising people<sup>12</sup>. As the renowned historian Alberto Vieira states:

“In the fifteenth century Europe embarked on a quest for the biblical Eden or the one described in the Greco-Roman classic literature. This was one of the reasons for Columbus' diligence and also that of the Portuguese sailors. The reunion was faced as a conciliation with God, the erasing of Adam and Eve's original sin<sup>13</sup>. The image pursued almost every sixteenth century seaman and the ones that cast anchor in Madeira are no exception<sup>14</sup>.”

In fact, the Discoveries had as a deep motivation economic ambition but also, with equal or superior importance, the motive based on the ideary of accomplishment of a transcendent mission. This is why Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, in his analysis of the economic conjuncture, explains the phenomenon of the discoveries, recognising that 'economic' importance