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Item Type	Article
Authors	Kive, Solmaz Mohammadzadeh
Publisher	College of Arts and Sciences, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
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Download date	2026-11-10 01:15:37
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/218382

THE OTHER SPACE OF PERSIAN GARDEN

Solmaz Mohammadzadeh Kive

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO DENVER

Abstract

The Persian garden is claimed to be an "other space," a place utterly different from yet fundamentally connected to the rest of places. In the light of Foucault's discussion of "other spaces on one hand, and the representation of garden in the twelfth-century Persian poem Haft Paykar on the other, this paper is concerned with the way the places of everyday life are conditioned by the Persian garden. As a microcosm, the Persian garden bears the image of Paradise, of the perfect place. As an actual place, it is elevated to an earthly paradise, a perfected place. Considering it as a perfect, unqualified ideal place which remains unattainable and, at the same time, an entirely ordered place, which is perfected into an ideal place, the paper considers the interplay of the two forms of the ideal place (the perfect and the perfected) to discuss the way the Persian garden simultaneously contrasts, typifies and nullifies the other places.

Introduction

The reflection of Paradise in the Persian garden is a commonplace of criticism. Embodying an exceptional perfection that is denied from the everyday places, the Persian garden is distinguished from them as an utterly different place, that is, a place not belonging to the everyday experiences. However, the other side of this exclusion is connection. Positioned outside the ordinary, the Persian garden reveals and establishes the limits of the everyday places where we live. Foucault draws attention to "other spaces" (heterotopias)[1] as the particular places that are separated from and connected to the rest of spaces in a certain way; "they suspend, neutralize, or reverse the set of relations that are designated, reflected, or represented [*réflechis*] by them."[2]

A Persian garden is an actual place, located in a real site. Nevertheless, as an ideally ordered place which also bears the image of Paradise, it is distinguished from the other places in terms of its given spatial and formal properties. It is also physically isolated through its high surrounding walls and its system of opening and closing. Whereas some heterotopias such as museums and cinemas join elements of time and place that are in themselves incompatible, the Persian garden, which is famously recognized as a microcosm, symbolically gathers within a single place the universe, that is, the entire space. While in museums and cinemas time is abolished and also regained through accumulation of history,[3] in the Persian garden, which is associated with the New Year rituals, the demolishing continuity of traditional

[1] Foucault's lecture (1967) is first published in French under the title "Des Espaces Autres" (1984). In the first English translation (1986), it appears as "Of Other Spaces'. A later translation (1998) renders it as "Different Space". Though as Johnson explains, the latter appears to be a more faithful translation, in this paper the more commonly used term "Other Space" is employed for the sake of consistency with the literature. Peter Johnson, "Unravelling Foucault's 'different spaces'." *History of the Human Sciences* 19, no. 4 (2006).

[2] Michel Foucault, "Different Spaces," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 1998), 178.

[3] Ibid., 182-83.

time is replaced with the original eternity.[4]

In his relatively short lecture, Foucault ascribes a few more principles to heterotopias, most of which can be traced in the Persian garden. However, this paper is not as much concerned with whether or not the Persian garden is an "other space" as it is with the ramifications of its otherness: the way it operates as an actual place in which the other places are "at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed."[5] Considering the Persian garden as both an image and a place, this paper searches for the conceptions and implications of this double register in the *Haft Paykar*, a Romance by the famous twelfth-century poet Nizâmi. Arguing for the difference between the image of Paradise, as the ultimate, perfect place on one side, and the idea of the place that is perfected through absolute order on the other, it discusses the mirroring function of the Persian garden in the interplay of these two forms of the ideal space. Preceded by an introduction to the *Haft Paykar*, the main body of the paper discusses the two above-mentioned aspects in two separated sections, and the connection between them in the last section.

The Haft Paykar

Texts dealing with the Persian garden usually underline the connection between the idea of Paradise and the gardens of Persia, the relation that is strongly supported by the fact that the word "Paradise" is derived from the Old Persian word "pairidaeza" as Cyrus called his garden. Similarly, in the Islamic tradition, the Quran refers to Paradise as "al-janna" literally meaning "the Garden." The similarities between the Islamic gardens[6] and descriptions of the Garden in the Quran have convinced many critics that these gardens were designed in imitation of the Garden.[7]

As frequently noted, Persian literature is highly rich in garden imagery. In countless examples, actual and imaginary gardens are celebrated and idealized. However, the image of garden in literature is not limited to descriptions of the features of a garden (bâgh). Rather it symbolizes the perfect as such. In fact, though the garden as an actual place is inseparable from its image in language, the latter passes the limits of space and stands for anything perfect, which is not limited to places, but also includes human and his experiences for instance, the word "bâgh" (garden) may be attributed to one's beloved. Even language may be perceived as a garden, as reflected in numerous literary works named after the gardens.[8] To explore the conception of the garden in Perso-Islamic culture, this article discusses the gardens in the *Haft Paykar*, a twelfth-century poem by Nizâmî, whose romances are especially noted for their rich, descriptive imagery. In fact, many physical features ascribed to the Persian garden can be traced in this poem. More importantly, however, the gardens featured in this romance differ in response to the incident they contain and the underlying meaning of the episodes.

The *Haft Paykar*, also known as *Haft Gonbad* (Seven Domes) and Bhrâm-Nâmi (Book of Bahram), is the fourth romance in Nizâmî's *Khamsa* (Quintet), also known as *Panj Ganj* (Five Treasures). The romance is composed of two main parts, one within the other. The frame story recounts the legendary life

[4] See Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History; The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper, 1959), 49-91.
[5] Foucault, "Different Spaces," 178.
[6] Throughout the article, the words "Persian garden" and "Islamic garden" are used interchangeably, regarding the context. Conceding its root in the pre-Islamic gardens of Persia, and the role of Zoroastrian beliefs and rituals on Islamic images of garden, this article is focused on Iranian gardens in the Islamic era. In fact, the broad term "Persian garden" may neglect the historical alterations. On the other hand, the word "Islamic garden" overlooks the spatial diversity of the form and ideas throughout the Islamic countries as well as the origin of these gardens. Since this study is mainly concerned with Persian literature, most often the term "Persian garden" is employed, unless the context requires the other one.
[7] Schimmel and many after her associate the charbagh (literally four gardens) pattern to the Quranic description of four rivers of the Garden, the *Hasht Bihisht* (literally, Eight Heavens) pattern to the eight heavens and gates ascribed to it. Annemarie schimmel, "The Celestial Garden in Islam," in *The Islamic Garden*, ed. Elisabeth B MacDougall; Richard Ettinghausen (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, 1976). However, the association of charbagh with this quadrilateral pattern and its wide popularity before Safavid dynasty (16th century) is widely questioned. Mahvash Alemi, "Chahar Bagh," *Environmental Design: Journal of the Islamic Environmental Design Research Centre* I (1986).
[8] See JR. William L. Hanaway, "Paradise on Earth: The Terrestrial Garden in Persian Literature," in *The Islamic Garden*, ed. Elisabeth B MacDougall; Richard Ettinghausen (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, 1976).

of Bahrâm V (also known as Bahrâm Gür), a pre-Islamic Iranian king.[9] The second part, the central interlude, comprises seven tales told by Bahrâm's seven brides. The word "*Haft Paykar*" is a reference to these seven stories, which can be translated as seven "images," "portraits," "beauties," "planets,"[10] "faces,"[11] or "effigies."[12]

As Nizâmî recounts, after sitting on the throne, Bahrâm fulfills his old dream of marrying seven princesses of seven climes for whom he builds in his garden/palace seven domes in different colors.[13] The king spends each night of the week in one of the domes where the princess, wearing in the same color as the dome, narrates a love story related to that color and the planet associated with it.[14] The frame story mainly includes historical, yet highly mythicized, materials, which are arranged in chronological order. In contrast, the seven stories of the interlude are all imaginary tales with no apparent interconnection.

The *Haft Paykar* is frequently interpreted in terms of a sub-current of the doctrine of human perfection and self-knowledge. Other than the allegorical meanings implicit in each section, the seven tales of the interlude symbolize the seven steps of a spiritual journey. When seen as a whole, the seven tales also evoke other septenaries that symbolize wholeness and perfection. Bahrâm's seven wives are the princesses from seven climes that constitute the whole terrestrial world. He visits them in seven nights, which form a whole week. Each night of the week is associated with one of the seven planets, which constitute the celestial world, and so forth.[15] On the other hand, the frame story can be read as an allegory of the tripartite stages of human perfection, which includes knowledge of the body, knowledge of the soul (gained through the journey in seven domes) and knowledge of the two together.[16]

The analysis of the romance falls far beyond the scope of this paper. Here, the main intention is to understand the conception/experience of garden at the time. In the rest of the paper, the descriptions of gardens and associated incidents in three sections of the *Haft Paykar* are employed to address different aspects of the Persian garden. First, in the tale narrated in the Black Dome, the first section of the interlude, the image of the ideal garden as the unqualified, yet unattainable, perfect place is considered. Then, using the seventh tale of the interlude, narrated in the White Dome, the Persian garden is discussed as an ideal place that is perfected through order. Finally, from the frame story, the episode of Bahrâm's end is employed to discuss the interplay of the perfect and the perfected. More concerned with its disciplining function, this part discusses the way the Persian garden as both an image and a place conditions the rest of places.

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[9] The story of Bahrâm's life (the frame story) is reflected in other sources before Nizâmî the most famous of which is Ferdwsi's Shahnâmeh (Book of Kings) completed in the early eleventh century. However, Nizâmî's romance reflects significant changes in comparison to Ferdowsi's epic. Most importantly, Bahrâm's life is narrated as an allegory to human perfection; thus the history is mythicized. For instance, Bahrâm does not die. Rather, he vanishes into a cave. On the other hand, the seven stories and their inclusion within Bahrâm's life is Nizâmî's invention, though the structure of a story within a story and the theme of the seven-staged journey have a much longer history. Zolfaghari counts twenty-one works (beginning from about one century after Nizâmî's work) that imitate the *Haft Paykar*. Though most of them have changed the stories as well as the colors associated with the domes, in the existing ones that use the color as the distinction of the domes, all begin with black and finish with white. Hasan Zolfaghari, "Haft Paykar and its Imitations," *Tarbiat - Moallem Unversity Journal*, no. 52-53 (2006).

[10] Julie Scott Meisami, introduction to *The Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance*, trans. Julie Scott Meisami, The World's classics (Oxford [England]; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), xl.

[11] C. E. Wilson, introduction to *The Haft Paikar (The Seven Beauties),* by Nezami Ganjavi (London: A. Probsthain, 1924).

[12] Muhammad Mu`in, *Analizes of Nizamî's Haft Paykar* (Tehran: Tehran university, 1960).

[13] In this romance, palace and garden are occasionally used interchangeably in reference to the same structure.

[14] The seven tales and their associated planets and colors are in the following order: 1st as referable to Saturn, Saturday, is Black; 2nd as referable to Sun, Sunday, is yellow; 3rd as referable to Moon, Monday, is silvery green; 4th as referable to Mars, Tuesday, is red; 5th as referable to Mercury, Wednesday, is blue; 6th as referable to Jupiter, Thursday, is sandal-wood; 7th as referable to Venus, Friday, is White. Wilson, introduction to *The Haft Paikar (The Seven Beauties)*.

[15] The analyses of the number seven and the link between the *Haft Paykar*'s seven domes and the seven stages of mysticism can be found in Mu`in, *Analizes of Nizamî's Haft Paykar*, and Wilson, introduction to *The Haft Paikar (The Seven Beauties)*. Mu'in emphasizes the importance of septenaries for pre-Islamic Iranians as the number of Zoroastrian archangels as well as the number of the stages of holiness in Mithra cult. In Islam, there are seven skies and seven layers of meaning of Quran. In Iranian Mysticism, there are seven stages of the spiritual journey. He also links these seven domes with Babylonian seven temples associated to each one of the seven planets.

[16] See Meisami, introduction to *The Haft Paykar*.

The Black Dome: The Unattainable Perfect

On Saturday, the first day of the week in Islamic calendar, Bahrâm sits in the Black Dome and hears the first tale from the Princess of India. The tale's protagonist, once a joyful king, hears about "a realm adorned like paradise [kholdi barîn]"[17] in China whose inhabitants always dress in black. In search of the secret of their perpetual mourning, the king abandons his kingdom and travels to China in disguise. After spending one year in the mysterious city, he finally persuades a butcher to reveal to him the city's tale. In a dark night, the butcher leads the king towards a remote ruin, brings him a basket and asks him to sit in it to find the answer of his question. As soon as the king sits down, the basket flies over the top of a high column reaching the moon. There, the hopeless man, suspended between earth and sky, clings to the talons of a gigantic bird and unexpectedly reaches "a garden [rowzah] untouched by the dust of men."[18]

After wandering through the garden, enjoying the beauty of its countless flowers and eating of its fruits, the king rests beneath a cypress for a while. As night falls, innumerable graceful and charming maidens [hourîs][19] approach the garden, spread carpets and set up thrones "like those of Paradise." Soon their queen Turktâz (Turkish Raid) arrives whose beauty outshines them all. She receives the man with boundless hospitality and seats him on the throne beside her. The king enjoys the royal food and wine as well as the music and dance within the garden. After the feast, he is allowed the favors of any maiden of his choice except for the queen. Things continue in the same order for the days he spends in the garden, he joins the queen in the nightly feast and then couples with one of her charming maidens. "By day I in the garden dwelled, by night in Paradise." [20]

Finally, in a dark world with no moon in the sky, when he meets the queen, his desire passes all bounds and he pursues that one thing not permitted to him. After a long sequence of his plea and the queen's refusal, she finds him unable to restrain his desire, thus asks him to close his eyes to let her disrobe. Opening his eyes, as the king recalls, "But when I looked towards my bride / I found me in that basket tied."[21] Brought down from the column by the butcher, he dresses in the very blackness of the night as a sign of "that my desire, so nearly gained / was, through my rawness, unattained."[22]

The garden represented in this story is clearly a place outside the ordinary. This garden is an "other space" due to its separation from the rest of places as a perfect place. It is an "other space" also inasmuch as it provides an experience that is excluded from ordinary life. The truth revealed to the king cannot even be expressed in language of this world. Whereas at the beginning of the story, the mysterious guest of the king refuses to disclose the reason for his wearing black, at the end the butcher reminds the king, "A hundred years I might have told this tale / you'd not have grasped its truth." [23]

The reference to the story of man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden is clear. Not dissimilar to his ancestors, the King of Black pursues the one thing he is denied and accordingly looses the perfect place/life[24] forever.[25] Similar to its prototype, in the story of the Black Dome, the paradise from which man is exiled is a garden. As Meisami notes, this garden is mainly described in terms of natural perfection closely linked to the satisfaction of the senses.[26] Describing this place, the poet elaborates on the color of flowers and their fragrance, the sounds of birds, the tastes of fruits, the freshness of water, the shadow of trees, etc.

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[17] Nezami Ganjavi, *The Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance*, trans. Julie Scott Meisami, *World's classics* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 109.
[18] Ibid., 115.
[19] A beautiful young woman, especially one of the virgin companions of the faithful in the Muslim Paradise (Oxford dictionary)
[20] Nezami Ganjavi, *The Haft Paykar*: 126.
[21] Ibid., 131.
[22] Ibid., 132.
[23] Ibid., 131.
[24] In Islamic eschatology, the afterlife is linked to the afterworld, which is a physically described place and a thing. Nerina Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture*, (2009): xvi-xvu.
[25] Quran says "And We said, 'O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat therefore in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers." Quran - 2:35
[26] Julie Scott Meisami, "Allegorical Gardens in the Persian Poetic Tradition: Nezami, Rumi, Hafez," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17, no. 2 (1985): 233.

A myriad flowers blossomed there,
its water sleeping, grass aware.
Each flower was of a different shade;
the scent of which for miles did spread […]
Streams flowed like rose-water, and hid
pearls and carnelians in their midst; […]
The fish in those bright streams did play
like silver coins in mercury […][27]

These verses resemble Quranic descriptions of the Garden "[…] wherein are rivers of water unaltered, rivers of milk the taste of which never changes, rivers of wine delicious to those who drink, and rivers of purified honey, in which they will have from all [kinds of] fruits and forgiveness from their Lord, […]."[28] Not dissimilar to the garden of this tale, in the Garden the believers will recline upon couches and "find therein maidens [hourîs] restraining their glances … lovely as rubies, beautiful as coral."[29] In fact, as represented in this story, in Perso-Islamic culture the image of the absolute perfect place/life is not bound to any order or discipline. This unqualified perfection, as will be discussed, is denied from the man-built gardens.

Furthermore, the perfect place/life is by definition inconsonant with the earth and the earthly man whose desire is always "unattained," as the King of Black laments. Throughout the *Haft Paykar,* the impossibility of perfection on earth is also suggested through the references to the ephemerality of any achieved pleasure. The description of any ideal place is followed by an allusion to its imperfection and temporality. For instance, as the architect Shîda proposed Bahram to build him a palace containing seven domes, Bahram

replied to him: were I to build
an iron-gated house of gold;
Yet, in the end, since all must die,
why go to this trouble? Why[30]

Similarly, after elaborating on the beauty of Bahrâm's marvelous Seven Dome garden/palace, Nizâmi immediately adds, "Yet though he built him such a fortress, / he could not escape death finally."[31]

The conception of unattainability of the ultimate, perfect place/life on earth is well reflected in the legendary garden of Iram. As Quran tells, Shaddad, the king of south Arabia, had read a description of the pavilions and gardens of Paradise in ancient books and vowed to build such a place, the Garden of Iram. God sent a messenger to Shaddad, warning him not to challenge the Almighty, but he ignored the warning. As soon as the construction of the garden/city with its splendid pavilions and the high surrounding wall was finished, the king went to visit it. However, he was struck down by God before he could enter the gate. Thereupon, all roads to the city/garden were hidden.[32] This legend once more represents a garden that is present, yet unattainable. However, in spite of the implication of transgressing the Almighty's will, Iram still stands for the ideal place that goes beyond the boundaries of possibilities, as throughout the *Haft Paykar* and in countless other examples, Iram is evoked interchangeably with Paradise (Bihisht).

What makes Iram particularly significant is that it exists on earth. The epitome of the actual, perfect place is not destroyed but hidden. Its perpetual absence is present in the rest of spaces, making them always wanting. Similarly, in the story of the Black Dome where the perfect place/life is both given and

[27] Nezami Ganjavi, *The Haft Paykar*,115.
[28] Quran 47:15
[29] Quran 55:48-76
[30] Nezami Ganjavi, *The Haft Paykar,* 102.
[31] Ibid., 105.
[32] Quran 89:6-13. Summary in D. Fairchild Ruggles, *Islamic gardens and landscapes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

withdrawn, the omnipresence of this experience of losing is underlined by the whole city wearing black. To put it differently, the perfect place is an "other space" the rest of the space is not and can never be. The Persian garden, which is associated with the exceptional incidents and separated from the everyday places as the image of the ideal place, is an "other space" that mirrors the imperfection of the ordinary places. One may conclude that it is a place from the standpoint of which, "I discover my absence from the place where I am […]", as Foucault says, describing the example of the mirror.[33]

The highly idealized garden of this story is not the best possible place on this world. Rather, as reflected in the Persian word "Bihisht" (meaning Paradise), it is of a different nature; it is "the better place."[34] Accordingly, in spite of its highly idealized features, garden as the absolute perfect place cannot operate as an order-giving utopia, the model that organizes the other places. Unlike utopia, which usually represents the absolute ordered place in its perfection, the perfect place that is symbolized in the Persian garden is utterly beyond order. It exists as a lost ideal, a lack which operates in tandem with the order-giving ideal, as will be discussed.

The White Dome: The Perfected Imperfect

Bahram spends the seventh night of the week in the White Dome where the princess of Persia tells him the last tale. In contrast to the natural landscape of the first one, the garden presented in this story is man-made. The protagonist of the story is a young, beautiful, wise, accomplished man "of all things best, his chastity."[35] He has a garden "like Iram" surrounded by other gardens. Other than containing fresh streams, fruits, flowers, singing birds and cypresses, the garden is distinguished through its design:

> *Its four walls, carefully designed,*
> *were smooth and solid all around.*
> *Its buildings to the moon rose high,*
> *no way there in for Evil Eye.* [36]

Each week the man goes there "in his free time" and spends time gardening. One day, however, he finds the gate shut, the garden full of song and the gardener "lulled by the harp's strains." [37] Seduced by the sweet love songs from the garden, the man cannot wait anymore. He breaches a hole in the wall and enters the garden to participate in the feast. Not yet given a chance to watch the garden and the lovely maidens within it, he is seized and beaten by two of them. Upon recognizing the master and in order to compensate for their mistake, they guide him to a chamber of mud brick where he can watch the feast from a narrow aperture. Among lovely maidens swimming in a marble pool "full of pure water," the most attractive one catches his eye and he immediately falls in love. After finding his desire, the two maids bring him the "wondrous maiden" whose name is Bakht (Fortune).

Contrary to the first story, Bakht is quite receptive toward the man. However, as soon as he embraces her, the ancient chamber falls down and they have to flee. Upset with the misfortune, Bakht plays her harp and sings her lament. After hearing their story, the two maidens prepare the lovers another place. The story continues with variations on the same situation, disabling them from realizing their mutual desire. They are repeatedly interrupted, once by a cat pursuing a mouse, another time by a wolf chasing some foxes, etc. Finally, the master realizes the illicit nature of his desire. Appreciating God's grace for guarding him against such a sin, he decides to take the lady as his lawful wife. The narrative ends with their marriage in town without any reference to the garden.

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[33] Foucault, "Different Spaces," 178-79

[34] "Bihisht," the most common rendition of Arabic "al-janna" (the Garden) or Paradise, is derived from "vahishta" used in Avesta – the scripture of pre-Islamic Persian religion of Zoroastrianism – in reference to the otherworld. "Vahishta" literally means the better world. Md. Masud Alam, "Some Fundamentals of Islam in Relation to those of Zorozatrnism " *The CDR Journal* 1, no. 2 (2006).

[35] Nezami Ganjavi, *The Haft Paykar,* 218.

[36] Ibid., 218.

[37] Ibid., 219.

As anticipated by the number seven associated with the stages of human perfection, and white color associated with light and purification, and as emphasized by the passage near the end of the tale, the story is an allegory of human purification and perfection. Unlike the King of Black who failed to follow his queen's command that "On this one craving shut your door/ and laugh with joy forever more,"[38] the master of this story obeys the divine law and reaches his chosen f/Fortune. While persuasion of the unqualified pleasure, which is denied from the "earth wight,"[39] is but the source of a permanent sorrow, obedience to the divinely established order perfects one's life and brings him delight.

The garden of this story, the place in which man was purified and perfected, is itself perfected through order. As Meisami notes, in contrast to the garden of the Black Dome with its natural features such as beautiful flowers and birds' song were emphasized, this garden is described in terms of its artificial aspects.[40] The untouched land of the first tale, which did not appear to have any boundaries, has been replaced with a walled garden surrounded by other similar ones. Instead of the throne that was set up at night and removed in the morning, this garden contains high masonry structures. Even the streams of water are brought to order through basins. Order is also represented in human acts such as dancing in circles. From a mere agent of sensual pleasure, music and song have turned into the media of expression and communication as Bakht plays her harp and sings the story of their distress after each of their unsuccessful attempts.

As Burrell and Dale emphasize, the idea of the garden as a utopia has always been connected to the real or symbolic boundaries.[41] An important aspect of the idea of order is protection against external threat or internal disorder; at the end of this story, the man appreciates, "God's grace, eternal and divine / save us from being harmed by sin."[42] In a similar manner, throughout the *Haft Paykar,* places are frequently valued in terms of their protective measures, mainly the height of their walls. In this story, immediately after seizing the man, the two maidens recover the wall. "With brambles they closed up the breach, and freed themselves from the robber's reach."[43] On the other hand, the defense against external thread is coupled with ordering internal chaos, as this garden's four walls "solid all around" are also "carefully designed."[44] Similarly, Bahrâm's garden palace is enclosed with a "rampart against the lofty sphere. Within that fort, the Seven Domes [are gathered]."[45]

Along with the surrounding walls, as Ardalan highlights, geometry is the essence of paradise paradigm, which saves a place from internal chaos.[46] Rooted in the pre-Islamic gardens of Persia, one of the quintessential features of the Islamic garden is its geometrical layout governed by the square grid of passages and water channels. Typically, one or two main axes runs through the rectangular space within the four walls and symmetrically divide it into two, four or eight parts, which are in turn subdivided into smaller sections all following the same geometric pattern. Most often the main pavilion and/or the central water basin sit at the intersection of the principal axes and some smaller basins are placed on the secondary intersections. Like the central structure, all the water basins and plant beds are formed in geometrical shapes. Even every single decorative detail follows the same pattern. As the result, the space within the protective surrounding walls is perfected to embody the ideal geometrical order.

However, the well-arranged geometrical order that perfects the terrestrial garden at the same time reflects the limitation of the material world. One of the beginning sections of the *Haft Paykar* tells the story of the Prophet's ascent to Heaven (Mirâj) where the poem opposes the materiality of the human

[38] Ibid., 124.
[39] Ibid., 117.
[40] Meisami, "Allegorical Gardens in the Persian Poetic Tradition: Nezami, Rumi, Hafez," 238.
[41] Gibson Burrell and Karen Dale, "Utopiary: Utopias, Gardens and Organization," in *Utopia and Organization*, ed. Martin Parker (Oxford, U.K.; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Pub., 2002).
[42] Nezami Ganjavi, *The Haft Paykar,* 231.
[43] Ibid., 220.
[44] Ibid., 218.
[45] Ibid., 104.
[46] Nader Ardalan, ""Simultaneous Perplexity" : The Paradise Garden as the Quintessential Visual Paradigm of Islamic Architecture and Beyond " in *Understanding Islamic architecture*, ed. Attilio Petruccioli and Khalil K. Pirani (London; New York, N.Y.: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).

body with the pure presence of God. At the last stage, the prophet ascended to the realm of God where even archangels were not able to accompany him. There, in the presence of "directionless," says the poem, "below, above, before, behind, left, right / were one direction and the six were gone."[47] In other words, while the ideal terrestrial place is a well-ordered one, the absolute perfect place is beyond this order.

The distance between the perfect place of the Black Dome and the perfected garden of the White Dome can be traced in the other aspects of the stories. While the former is described as a perfect place, even better than Paradise (Bihisht), Iram and Heaven (Minoo),[48] the latter barely resembles Iram.[49] The same theme is reflected in other aspects of the story: the king and queen are replaced with an accomplished wise man and the most beautiful maiden; the extraordinary incident of the first tale, for which the protagonist has left his kingdom, is substituted with an illegal act. Perfected though it is, the earthly garden lacks the absolute perfection and the utter delight associated with it.

The conditional perfection achieved through order is fundamentally different from the ultimate. This disparity poses a tension in the idea of order. Order, which is desirable for its result, is in itself opposed to the ideal of unmitigated pleasure. This tension is resolved, or rather disguised, through the promise of the otherworld as the corollary result of obedience to law and order. Accordingly, order not only leads to the best possible place/life in this world, but it is also the only way of attaining the absolute perfect in the otherworld.

In the Persian garden, the gap between the perfect and the perfected is bridged by symbols and rituals, which are not at the qualitative distance of the resemblances. For instance, cypress and the basin of running water, the indispensable elements of the Persian garden, symbolize eternity and purity.[50] Notwithstanding its material nature, the symbol is at the same time its referent. At another level, geometry is the symbol of the immaterial order beyond the material, as Ardalan notes.[51] In terms of time, rituals play a similar role, making temporal connections with the origin. The Persian garden is closely related to the beginning of a new year at the arrival of spring.[52] In the New Year rituals, as Eliade explains, through temporal access to the original time and imitation of the original act of creation, the historical time is simultaneously annihilated and revived.[53] Accordingly, through unmediated connection to the origin, the imperfect place and time temporarily attain absolute perfection. However, as will be discussed in the next section, the connection to the origin is at the same time bridging the gap and maintaining it.

Finally, order becomes desirable for itself. It is juxtaposed with both sensual pleasure (such as the planets which are organized in geometrical patterns) and symbols (such as the water of life which is caught in the basins). At another level, paired with the image of the ultimate perfection, the spatial order is established as identical with the former. Desirable as a means to an end, order becomes per se desirable inasmuch as it stands for that end. Perhaps this dual function reaches its apex in the tomb garden. Like the other types, the tomb garden has a highly ordered, cross-axial layout. However, as opposed to the central kiosk of the other gardens, which is typically an airy structure in which one is not expected to reside for a

[47] Nezami Ganjavi, *The Haft Paykar,* 9.
[48] It is described as a place "[…] who taxes paid from Paradise [Bihisht]. 'Heart-ease' its name by Iram given, and by the turquoise sphere called heaven [minoo]" ibid. 115
[49] Noted in Meisami, "Allegorical Gardens in the Persian Poetic Tradition: Nezami, Rumi, Hafez."
[50] See Mojtaba Ansari, Ali Akbar Taghvaee, and Hadi Mahmoudi Nejad, "Cultural Beliefs Regarding Persian Gardens with the Emphasis on Water and Trees," *African and Asian Studies* 7, no. 1 (2008).
[51] Ardalan, ""Simultaneous perplexity": The Paradise Garden as the Quintessential Visual Paradigm of Islamic Architecture and Beyond". For symbolic meanings of geometrical orders and forms, see Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar, *The Sense of Unity : the Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).
[52] See William L. Hanaway, "Paradise on Earth: The Terrestrial Garden in Persian Literature."
[53] Eliade, *Cosmos and History; The Myth of the Eternal Return*: 49-91. At a more intimate level, the cultivation of a garden assumes a liturgical meaning. As Xenophon reports, Cyrus the Great personally planted trees in his pairidaeza, which according to Browne was an imitation of the creation of the world by God, the ordainer of order in nature. Cited in Mahvash Alemi, "Persian Gardens and Courtyards: An Approach to Designing Contemporary Architecture," in *Understanding Islamic* architecture, ed. Attilio Petruccioli and Khalil K. Pirani (London; New York, N.Y.: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002). In the story of the White Dome, the master had frequent visits to his garden and "ranged tall cypresses and jasmine sowed" (218).

long period,[54] the central building of the tomb garden housing the deceased is a solid domed room, which suggests its permanency. At the level of spatial order, it is a garden. At the level of a symbol, it is the Garden. The juxtaposition of the two equates the perfected place with the ultimate perfect. However, the bridged gap is also kept open; one can only make temporal visits to the eternal abode of the deceased.

The Seven Dome Garden: the Mirroring

To reiterate the discussions on the otherness, we can say the Persian garden is an "other space" inasmuch as it is the setting for the incidents that cannot take place in everyday life; they may be an ideal experience, as in the story of the Black Dome or a transgression of social law, as in the story of the White Dome. The Persian garden is an "other space" also in the sense that it is distinguished from the ordinary, being on one hand the ultimate perfect and, on the other hand, the most perfected place. The Persian garden is also physically separated from the rest of space either as a totally different realm, as in the "untouched" garden of the first tale, or as a place isolated by means of its walls, as in the seventh tale. The entry to this "other space" is either a magical transition as in the former, or an act of intrusion, as in the latter.

To reframe the topic in terms of the two forms of the ideal place, we can say the image of the garden as the ideal perfect is different from that of the ideally perfected. While the latter owes its perfection to order, the former is by definition beyond order. As long as the otherness is concerned, the Persian garden, whether the perfect or the perfected, is totally distinguished from the ordinary place, as briefly alluded to in the above summary. However, as far as the ramifications of this affirmed otherness is considered, the difference between the two is significant; one (archi)typifies the rest of places and the other neutralizes them. The rest of the paper discusses the (disciplining) function of the Persian garden, in light of a short episode from the frame story, which narrates Bahrâm's end.

As narrated in the first part of the frame story, Bahrâm, then crown prince grew up in the court in Yemen. In his palace, *Khovarnagh,*[55] Bahrâm approached a secret, closed room where he encountered a picture depicting him encircled by his seven lovely wives-to-be and immediately fell in love with them. In the course of the romance, this section is followed by many other episodes describing Bahrâm's adventures. However, after sitting on the throne, Bahrâm recall the dream of his youth and sets out to realize it. He builds the seven princesses the seven domes wherein they tell him the seven tales presented in the interlude.

Once the seven tales are told, the narrative continues with Bahrâm celebrating the New Year in his Seven Dome palace/garden. In this garden, Bahrâm hears news about the external threat of war with China as well as the internal disarray of his kingdom, which are the result of his vizier's abuse of his power in Bahrâm's absence. Bringing his vizier to trial, Bahrâm hears the testimony of seven prisoners who have been imprisoned unjustly. He settles all the problems and brings order to the country. Then he renounces the seven princesses and turns their domes into fire-temples. At the end, Bahrâm disappears into a cave.

This story underlines two apparently contradictory approaches to the current situations: ordering the disordered based on the ideal and denying the significance of the situation. First, from the description of Bahrâm's seven-domed palace/garden to the short closings of the seven tales, which refer to Bahrâm's delight in the tales, feasts, and the princesses, every sign indicates a utopic world which is in a sharp

[54] Compared to the gardens, which were normally associated with temporal residency, the palaces, especially those of the royal family were permanent residences, which enclosed one or more gardens. For the reflection of paradise in the medieval royal palaces in Iran, see Julia Scott Meisami, "Palaces and Paradises: Palace Description in Medieval Persian Poetry," in *Seeing Things : Texuality and Visuality in the Islamic World*, ed. Oleg Grabar and Cynthia Robinson (Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001).

[55] This structure and the architect are reflected in other sources, as well. Khovarnagh was a Sassanid palace, which is mixed with legendary descriptions. (Aliakbar Dehkhodâ, Mohammad Mo'in, and Ja'far Shahidi, *Loghatnâme: Encyclopedic Dictionary* (Tehran: Tehran University Publications, 1993).) In the *Haft Paykar*, it is particularly notable as the prototype of the Seven Dome garden/palace; the architect of the later is the disciple of Khovarnagh's builder; the similarity between their features is also noticeable, since the Seven Dome whether reaches its perfect or excels it, but still following the same criteria.

contrast to the actualities of his threatened and disordered kingdom. Similarly, the utopic justice governing the seven tales is far from the injustice revealed in the seven testimonies. In fact, the idea of utopia is closely connected to the image of the dystopia against which a society must be protected. The presence of this dystopia affirms the necessity of the order and justice (which is equated with Divine law). The idea of a world ordered in justice, as is presented in the seven tales, establishes a set of ideal laws that can give order to this world. [56]

A similar operation can be found in the order-giving function of the Persian garden in relation to the other places. Epitomizing the spatial order that is followed in other places, the Persian garden operates as an ideal model. A well-known feature in Iranian architecture is the arrangement of living spaces around a central courtyard, which resembles the Persian garden. This courtyard typically follows a geometrical pattern similar to, though less complex than, that of the Persian garden. It also contains some of the elements of the garden such as a basin and plant beds called mini-gardens (bâghche). Likewise, carpet represents the garden in the inner space. The Persian carpet, which traditionally occupies the center of the room, reflects the garden through its symmetrical order, surrounding brims and the pattern of idealized plants. Reaffirming the necessity of order through its reflection in other places, the Persian garden operates as an organizing, order-giving utopia. Finally, these representations of the Persian garden too elevate order to a desirable property by juxtaposing order with symbols of the ideal place and references to some elements of pleasure (such as idealized birds and flowers).

The story of Bahrâm's own life represents the other function of the ideal image. Bahrâm, is the perfected man who lives in an ideal palace/garden. Once he has realized all of his dreams and has perfectly ordered his kingdom, finally leaves the material world and disappears.[57] It is an illusion to the idea that the ultimate perfect is not attainable in this world, and more significant, none of the attainable, apparently ideal achievements are significant:

> *He left the Seven Domes to the sky,*
> *and towards another [heaven] took his way*
> *A dome which death won't tumble; where*
> *the enraptured rest till Judgment Day*[58]

A similar theme can be found in the story of the Black Dome. At the beginning of the tale, the Chinese city is described as "a realm adorned like Paradise" with beautiful folks.[59] On the contrary, the basket bound with the snake rope on a column is hostilely suspended between earth and sky from which the man "[…] dared not look above, and yet / lacked courage to look down […]." [60] However, after he is expelled from the garden, unlike the elaborated description of the beginning, the rest of the story, without any further reference to the city or people, simply states that the butcher unlooses the rope and brings him down. In other words, in the present of the ultimate perfect, the current situation loses its significance. While in the first tale the unattainable perfect ideal marks the ordinary as imperfect, in Bahrâm's story, the distance kept between the perfected life and the perfect life (whose image always accompany the former) operates in the same way; it undermines the significance of the ordered as well as that of the disordered.[61]

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[56] The *Haft Paykar* was meant to play a similar role for the ruler of Nizâmî's time when the actualities of politics were far from the ideal of kingship. Meisami, introduction to *The Haft Paykar*.

[57] For a discussion on symbolic meaning of the cave in this episode, see MJ Yahaghi and S Bameshki, "An Analysis of the Symbol of Cave in Haft Peikar," *Researches on Persian Language and Literature* 1, no. 4 (2010).

[58] Nezami Ganjavi, *The Haft Paykar,* 258.

[59] Ibid., 109.

[60] Ibid., 113.

[61] Though the *Haft Paykar* is usefully interpreted in terms of its sub-current of mysticism, its apparent didactic message is more close to the normative discipline, whereas the Sufi tradition stands beyond the norms. Though both undermine the significance of this world in comparison to the ideal perfect, the former postpones the ideal to the otherworld conditioned by one's deed in this world, whereas, for the latter, the real heaven is in the world. Thus, while the former supports the disciplining norms, the latter challenges it. Subtelny discusses in Rumi's poem the terrestrial garden in contrast to the "real garden" in the human heart. Maria

Actual gardens appear to operate in the same way. As discussed in the previous section, there is a gap between the geometrically perfected place and the ideal perfect; to bridge this gap, symbols also affirm it. Thus, one may argue the Persian garden as an actual perfected place, operates also as the image of the ultimate perfect. To put it differently, the garden is real, yet through symbolism it operates as a lack inasmuch as an unreal image does. It contrasts the terrestrial places with the absolute perfection they are not and never can be.

Finally, there is a predominant tendency among scholars to interpret heterotopia as a site of resistance against the dominant culture. The extent to which this reading is supported by Foucault's relatively short lecture and other concepts he developed throughout his career is beyond the scope of this article.[62] However, as far as the Persian garden is concerned, it seems to operate more in line with the dominant ideology than opposed to it. As an "other space" (heterotopia), the garden contains uncommon occurrences, including acts that can suggest transgression of normative behavior and law. However, as an "other space," through the distance it takes from the ordinary places, the garden categorizes them as exceptions. Excluding them from the ordinary, it safeguards the normative order. While as an actual place the Persian garden turns the potential resistance into an unconventional exclusion as the embodiment of the absolute order (the perfected place), it is repeated in other places, thus implying order as both a means of perfection and as an end in itself. Finally, as the symbol of the perfect place that this world is not, it makes the whole world insignificant, perhaps undermining any reason for resistance.

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E. Subtelny, "The Traces of the Traces: Reflections of the Garden in the Persian Mystical Imagination," in The Gardens and Imagination: Cultural History and Agency, Washington, D.C.; [Cambridge, Mass.], 2008).

[62] For the examples of the interpretation of gardens as sites of resistance, see C. Steyaert, "Queering space: Heterotopic life in Derek Jarman's garden," *Gender Work Organ. Gender, Work and Organization* 17, no. 1 (2010). and Melanie Nakaue, "Of Other Places: The Garden as a Heterotopic Site in Contemporary Art," Brock University, http://www.brocku.ca/brockreview/index.php/brockreview/article/view/30/42. For discussion on association of heterotopia with resistance, see Johnson, "Unravelling Foucault's "different spaces." For readings of Foucault's lecture by architects, also see Daniel Defert, "Foucault, Space, and the Architects," in *Politics/Poetics: Documenta X – The book*, ed. Catherine David and Jean-FranÁois Chevrier (Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz, 1997). In his later lecture, "Of Other Spaces", Foucault defines heterotopia as radically different places in which the ordinary place is "at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed." He also ascribes certain functions to them. However, the resistance Foucault refers to must be understood in the context of a more general reading of hierarchical interconnection of places constituting medieval space, which resist modernity's homogenization of space and time. According to him, while the time (the fascination of the nineteenth century) is to a good extend homogenized, space is not quite yet. Heterotopias and utopias are what resist or reflect the resistance to the homogenization of space.

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