

## EARLY MODERN GARDEN DESIGN ILLUSIONS AND DECEPTIONS. TWO DIFFERENT QUESTS FOR PARADISE - VILLA LANTE AT BAGNAIA AND VILLA ORSINI AT BOMARZO

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### **Abstract**

*Considered some of the most fascinating examples of Mannerist gardens in Italy, Villa Lante at Bagnaia and Villa Orsini at Bomarzo, were conceived in the late 16th century as a kind of landscape and architectural expressions of the Man's quest for the Lost Paradise. Although they were designed roughly in the same period of time, they differ completely in almost every sense, but, in the same time, they complete each other in many ways.*

*The following paper aims to compare the architectural layouts, planting designs and allegorical programmes of both gardens as to emphasize the way Paradise was seen in the late 16th century in Western Europe and to show two different landscape design mechanisms that try to mimic the quest for the (re)discovery of Eden.*

**Key words:** Paradise, garden philosophy, Mannerist, 16th century, Villa Lante, Bomarzo

### **INTRODUCTION**

If we can consider the garden to be an image – a figure, then, walking through the garden, through its paths may often be a real process of allegories - a process of figuration and most of all, especially in the Late Renaissance – a quest for finding God. Perhaps the most representative examples of this figurative process of some of the ideas the garden is trying to convey are the famous Italian Mannerist gardens of the sixteenth century; and out of these, two stand out - they both complement but also cancel each other; they intertwine, but are fundamentally different, they revolve around almost identical ideas and symbols, but convey different messages (apud. Lazzaro, 1980). The two gardens, Villa Lante from Bagnaia and Villa Orsini or Sacro Bosco from Bomarzo, build both on their own and together a universe translated into a microcosm of symbols, alchemical allegories and meta-linguistic messages – they tackle the theme of Man's return in Paradise but offer distinct solutions and variants:

*"The Renaissance Universe is hierarchical, with God at the summit, human beings in the center, nature below, and each part related to the other. The natural world was perceived in terms of its usefulness for human needs: plants*

*and animals provide food and medicine. They also reflect human traits, virtues and beliefs and therefore serve as symbols – heraldic, moral, philosophical and religious. At the same time, the visible world corresponds with the divinely cosmos – the microcosmo reflects the macrocosm. To know this world is therefore to know God. " (Lazzaro, 1990)*

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In order to understand the process of figuration and the quest to find the Lost Paradise that the two gardens promise, one must first closely observe all of the components of Villa Lante and of Villa Orsini. To this end, the following chapter aims to focus on reorganizing the gardens' elements in order to recompose the allegorical messages they intended to express when they were built.

#### **Villa Lante and the Retrieval of Paradise**

Villa Lante is probably the most interesting landscaping complex of the sixteenth century in Italy; it amazes through the architectural structure adopted in the garden, the use of slopes, water, by joining a *Hortus Conclusus* with a *bosco* etc. But the most spectacular part of this villa is precisely the philosophical story

it is trying to share through the arts, architecture and natural elements.

The landscaping complex brings together two complementary compositions – the mathematical garden or the tamed nature and the *bosco* or the wild nature – "Nature, the very embodiment of ultimate divinity, was terrifying not only in its absolute power but also in its lack of content. Only mankind, the political animal, intended something" (Scully, 1991). If the landscaping mathematics suggests divine reason and talks about a Heaven created by a mathematical God (*Deus geometer*) then the *bosco* or the forest represents the original chaos, the Fall and also the antithesis of Paradise.

The garden uses artistic metaphors and takes the visitors on an allegorical route that includes the main historical stages or key moments of the human life on its continuous path to absolute reason, to finding Paradise again – to illumination. This figural process starts from the chaos of the forest and ends in "geometry and perspective", but at the same time, it goes through several "checkpoints" that define the human condition from its appearance on earth until it reaches the supreme goal – reaching illumination or finding the lost Eden.

To be more exact, the route begins through a secondary gate and not at the primary (as one might think) that brings visitors face to face with the fountain of the mythical Pegasus. The image, through the legend that revolves around this sacred animal (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1995), suggests the fact that this place is the origin of all things and of the adventure that aims to obtain the ultimate divine illumination. The place where the winged horse's hoof hits the ground becomes the starting and the inspiration point that will help man find the realm of reason – the mathematical Heaven! (Don, 2008).

Located at the entrance of the complex, the fountain of Pegasus can be found right next to the very landscaping expression of Heaven – the mathematic garden; but the visitor is not allowed to get directly to it and neither does he know this garden exist. This garden takes the form of a *Hortus Conclusus* and a *Garden of paradise* at the same time – "Originally, fences were a practical land symbolical necessity for

*enclosing sacred places, and indeed the very concept of the enclosure had been deeply rooted in the vocabulary of the garden ever since the medieval term Hortus Conclusus identified its special character. Enclosing even a small bed with a fence or even just a small border was a means of making it sacred, so that its symbolic value took priority over any practical purpose" (Vercelloni and Vercelloni, 2009).*

The fountain has therefore a double role - invites the visitor to enter the garden, but also represents a hyphen which both separates and links the wild garden with the rational one.

Leaving the fountain of Pegasus behind, in front of the visitor's eyes appears the forest (symbol of the unconscious and of anti-reason, chaos) from which point he can choose many paths, each sending him to a new adventure and a new discovery. Among the most significant such points of the *bosco* one might remember a few elements such as: Il Barco, the maze, the beaver's fountain, the mascarons' fountain, the lions' fountain, the fountain of Bacchus etc.

**Il Barco.** Il Barco is actually a hunting annex built by Cardinal Ottaviano Riario Visconti, grandson of the original owner of the complex, the Cardinal Raffaele Sansoni Riario (Ehrenfried, 2007). The latter was the one who in 1498 closed the entire perimeter of Villa Lante with walls, making it a hunting park. The building, which still bears the symbols of Cardinal Ottaviano Riario Visconti (a snake coiled around a flower), was used as a hunting pavilion and later was incorporated into the *bosco's* structure (<https://villalante.wordpress.com/il-barco/>).

**The lions' fountain.** The Lions' fountain represents a statuary set, hidden deep in the woods, and it is made up of a circular dip in stone with 4 symmetrically displayed lions with water flowing out of their mouths. There is no known accurate information on the origin and/or its significance, but this element is present even in the sixteenth century famous plan of Villa Lante. (<https://villalante.wordpress.com/il-barco/>).

**The mascarons' fountain.** The mascarons' fountain is also hidden deep in the woods, and, just as in the Lions' fountain, there is not much information on its origin or meaning.

Moreover, in the centre of the rectangular basin that surrounds it, one can find an almost identical fountain with that on the right of the Diluvial Fountain on the upper terrace of the geometric garden (<https://villalante.wordpress.com/il-barco/>).

These parallels between the two distinct microcosms (the forest garden and the mathematic garden) seem to realize connections between them, joining the two separate parts of the villa both physically and symbolically, making them indissoluble.

**Beaver's Fountain.** This fountain also follows the same pattern, as it is not yet described in any of the researched documents. Perhaps it also aims to highlight the natural wilderness and it contributes to shaping that image and atmosphere of chaos.

**The Labyrinth.** Unlike the other elements mentioned above, this one no longer exists today. Given the fact that the symbolic significance of the maze is made up of a search process, it is perfectly plausible for this part of the garden to be located in the *bosco* just to emphasize the chaos and incessant search of the individual for a higher world. Perhaps its purpose was to entice visitors, making them believe that going through the maze would get them out of this forest with sacred powers, while it did nothing else but to bring man even more to the Fall, deceiving and tiring him. Moreover, the metaphor of the labyrinth was doubled by the metaphor of the forest (in itself a maze), the route becoming increasingly more difficult and dangerous through the *bosco*, the exit out of this place getting a much brighter aura.

Having escaped from the forest adventure, visitors can step into perhaps the most spectacular garden of the Italian Mannerism. This new landscaping construction suggests liberation from the terror of the unconscious and takes its visitors on a straight path that runs together with the tumultuous journey of a watercourse. So the water becomes the guide and leads man towards his ultimate goal.

*"The Early Renaissance garden was primarily static and could be viewed in its entirety from a fixed point of view. To borrow from literary terminology, it had a unity of space and time. The gardens after the 1520s consisted of a*

*series of successive spaces, isolated from each other physically and visually. They could only be experienced through movement, and the relationship between spectator and garden became active rather than passive. "* (Graafland, 2003 quoting MacDougall, \*\*\*)

The water, which must be followed closely, stems from the so-called "Fountain of the Diluvial" (Iliescu, 2014). It symbolizes the biblical flood that cleansed the world of "impurities" and that provides through purification the chance of a new order of life. This allegorical fountain separates therefore the garden of knowledge from the infamous *bosco*. It is composed of three major elements, each creating a new image and outlining a new symbol that completes the allegories of this ensemble. The fountain leads the way to thinking and reason, representing in the philosophical semantics of the garden, the "archaic harmony between man and nature" ([http://www.lazio.dk/villa\\_lante\\_di\\_bagnaia.htm](http://www.lazio.dk/villa_lante_di_bagnaia.htm)) – the relationship of interdependence and mutual respect between a rational being and his life environment.

So the main source of water comes from a cave, a symbol of the maternal womb and uterus, highlighting both the purifying role of the water and the symbolic role of the cave. This cave is flanked by two loggias that Cardinal Gambara adorned with paintings of the muses from the Greco-Roman mythology – thereby suggesting the divine role of the arts in the man's process of search and finding of the Paradise. From the roofs of these loggias spring up, in the spirit of Late Renaissance or Mannerism, a series of fine water jets designed to capture and sprinkle visitors – a typical farce of the sixteenth century.

The last piece of this fountain is composed of a container made of carved stone with four symmetrically arranged human figures on the outside. Perhaps, just like its counterpart in the *bosco*, this too forms a link between the human being and the route that he must follow in life and the entire vocabulary of symbols associated to number four (4 seasons, 4 cardinal points, 4 human states, 4 dominant winds, 4 sacred rivers of Paradise, 4 phases of the moon, 4 elements etc). Moreover, this element makes, through repetition, a new link

between the forest and the geometrical garden, pointing out the connections, the rivalry, but also the interdependence between the two seemingly antithetical components of the landscaping complex from Bagnaia – *"a garden manifests the rivalry between man and nature, not the victory of one over the other"* (apud. Lazzaro, 1990).

The allegorical route continues along a strong symmetry axis subordinated to a straight route of a water course. Following its course, water takes the form of a hexagonal fountain (the Dolphin Fountain- which incorporates the heraldic symbols of Cardinal Gambara) where, the path narrows and opens in a depth perspective, along a water staircase which opens and ends with one architectural item representing Cardinal Gambara's emblem – the crayfish. From here, the water flows further to the Giants' waterfall, an architectural waterfall flanked by the statues of the Tiber and Arno rivers. This, with its two statues arranged symmetrically as to the way water falls, symbolizes the friendship between the Papacy in Rome (Tiber) and the Medici family in Florence (Arno). From the allegorical fountain of the two rivers, the water keeps flowing through the Cardinals' table (object made out of stone that served as entertainment and dining space) (apud. <https://villalante.wordpress.com/mensa-del-cardinale/>).

According to Kluckert Ehrenfried, the Giants' fountain and its layout on the central axis in the middle of the geometrical garden can be interpreted as a metaphor not only for the friendship between the Medici and Vatican, but also as a metaphor for the road from Bagnaia to Bomarzo (Ehrenfried, 2007), or from Searching for Heaven to Avoiding Eden.

From the Cardinals' Table, the water leads to an "Enlightenment" which is more and more visible. The course takes the form of a new waterfall – Waterfall of Lights, and this one, unlike the other decorative pieces, does not include in its design statues of human or animals figures, but terraces with pots of flowing water. However, although it doesn't incorporate human figures, statues of Greek and Roman deities, Venus and Neptune, can be found in caves arranged symmetrically to

the central axis (Iliescu, 2014). The Waterfall of Lights can be seen as representing boiling water or the purifying force of water and fire combined

(<https://villalante.wordpress.com/fontana-dei-lumicini/>).

Leaving behind this fine work of art, the view widens and opens up to the last two parts of the garden. However, before concluding the allegorical route, the visitor can observe the appearance of two identical buildings located on one side and the other of the watercourse: Pallazina Gambara and Pallazina Montalto.

Pallazina Gambara was the first building erected in the "Garden of knowledge/of reason". Built between 1568-1578 after a square plan, it incorporated the Gambara family symbol, the crayfish (symbol of the road to Salvation, symbol of loyalty), and a torch (symbol of martyr fire) and an inscription (SOL ALIIS) that can be interpreted as saying eighter "Only for others" - meaning that the project was conceived as a spiritual message addressed by the Cardinal to the visitors or "Light for others" - meaning that the sun, symbol often used by heretics and pagans, is for all and not just for the Church of Rome (<https://villalante.wordpress.com/palazzina-gambara/>).

Moreover, it seems that these symbols are related one way or another with a comet which coincided with the time the pavilion was constructed

(<https://villalante.wordpress.com/palazzina-gambara/>); but so far, this information could not be verified. Inside, the building has painted scenes which almost always show ideas linked to Salvation and the (re)discovery of Paradise. Palazzina Montalto, although it appeared in the original design of Cardinal Gambara, it was built between 1590 and 1612 by Alessandro Peretti Montalto Damascena, nephew of Pope Sixtus V.

The only difference between the two pavilions consists in symbols that decorate the exterior of the two buildings. Thus, in Pallazina Montalto's case, the building's frieze is adorned with the following symbols: mountains representing the Montalto dynasty, a branch with pears, referring to the Peretti dynasty, the star with eight corners - Christian symbol of the eternal salvation. On the other

hand, the pavilion's interior was decorated in the same iconographic spirit as Pallazina Gambarà (<https://villalante.wordpress.com/palazzina-montalto/>).

Passing through the two pavilions that served as the owners and their servants' house in the past, the visitor ends the allegorical route of taming and of the absolute control of nature. This mastery of nature emerges as a geometric floor in which even water stops being wild, and it becomes subject to the human will. So, it is no longer churning and it no longer falls, but takes the form of a still water and stands in a geometric pool – the Fountain of the Moors.

This fountain is a reinterpretation of the Persian model of Heaven and is often perceived as embodying a calm sea that can be crossed in all directions. At its centre is not a piece of water or a pot with plants, as it happens in the Persian design and later in the Arabic and even Christian gardens, but we discover the statues of four young people (called Moors because of the dark color of the volcanic rocks they are made of) who support the heraldic symbols of the Montalto family (pears, mountains and the star with eight corners).

It seems that this reinterpretation of the Garden of Paradise is actually much more complex than it may seem. It appears that the perfect geometric shape of the garden was inspired by the legend of the martyrdom of St. Lorenzo. He was burned on a grill shaped like a grid because he refused to provide money from the Christian community to the prefect of Rome.

Moreover, Cardinal Gambarà was apparently very attached to this saint because one might even see that, in his pavilion, there is a fresco depicting the martyrdom of St. Stephen and Lorenzo. It is considered by some authors that this legend became the main theme of the garden of reason - *"the grid is, in other words, the sacred symbol representing Saint Lorenzo, one of the most celebrated holy Catholic men, who devoted his entire life to Jesus Christ and the Cross."* (<https://villalante.wordpress.com/graticola-disan-lorenzo/>).

Regarding the circular shape of the basin, it seems to have been inspired by the architecture of the church of Santo Stefano

Rontondo in Rome and together with the floors with rich embroideries of buxus represented, in Gambarà's view, symbols of absolute faith. Even the water gushing from the well was used as a metaphor of the road, purification and salvation that the visitor will receive when he will reach the heavenly Jerusalem

(<https://villalante.wordpress.com/fontana-dei-mori/>).

In the four rectangular pools arranged symmetrically around the central statue, there are four stone boats, each containing a soldier carved in stone. These were intended to represent four soldiers throwing water at the heraldic symbols, suggesting both the Protestant attacks of the Latin Church and especially the Turks' attacks stopped by the fleet led by some members of the Gambarà family at the Battle of Lepanto (<https://villalante.wordpress.com/fontana-dei-mori/>). At present, however, for unknown reasons, the water jet produced by the statues of the four soldiers goes the opposite direction - toward the ground floors with the box embroideries.

Beyond the geometric ground there is a narrow perspective that connects the central axis of the garden and the main street of Bagnaia. But to reach the city, the visitor must pass through a monumental gate disposed axially to the garden. This gate is present even in the sixteenth century plans, but its current configuration is most certainly due to the Lante della Rovere family (last owners of the Villa, XVII century) who decided to adorn this facade with their personal emblem. (<https://villalante.wordpress.com/passeggiando-nella-villa/ingresso-foto/>)

The allegorical route of this garden ends therefore, next to the central gate (Ingresso). It ends a process of figuration taking the visitor through a world that takes secular, mythological and biblical meanings, and that can talk to and relate both the divine purpose of man (retrieving Paradise) and his own passage through life. On the other hand, the same route can be travelled in the opposite direction, suggesting a path of retreat and meditation:

*"We start in the town at the foot of the mountain: the good, proud, sharp-edged,*

manmade town. From there, we enter a gate in a mythical wall. What can lie behind it? In fact, it opens upon a broad, geometric parterre with a deep basin of water lifted in its center, above which the stemma of the Montalto is flaunted in the air. Beyond the parterre, the villa is divided into two pavilions, one on the left, one on the right, with the ramps of Praeneste and Tivoli mounting between them toward a dark, heavily wooded garden. This climbs the mountainside toward secret pools and springs and is continued by a wooded park that climbs farther up the slopes – who knows, perhaps into the unknown heart of the mountain itself.

*What a sinister courtesy the villa opens up to invite us into the wild. How dark it is under the trees. As we press onward, the shaggy shapes of the forest begin to drive gods, water-worn, emerge, half human, half animal, covered with moss. Human shapes are merging back into the nature, perhaps beyond the animal to the vegetable world. [...] until suddenly the villa opens into its two parts once again, this time, miraculously, to let us out, to let us see the civilised parterre, but more than that, far more than that, to show us the city out there in the light beyond the forest, the work of man, our refuge and our only hope. " (Scully, 1991)*

Regardless of the route one takes, the landscaping from Bagnaia emphasizes the sanctity and divine meaning of the garden and creates through it, a microcosm which actually represents an Eden at a human scale, made possible through architectural and horticultural processes that mimic the human reasoning processes.

The garden being covered, and the message revealed, there is only one question left concerning the projection of the Villa Lante.

It is known that the Renaissance brought a series of physical and mathematical discoveries, including perhaps the most famous one, namely the linear perspective. This geometric construction will govern art, architecture, and gardens of the Renaissance, Mannerism and Baroque, becoming one of the main features of landscape design done in this period of time.

*"The harmony of the universe was echoed in the harmony created through human art in buildings, pictures, households, governments and gardens. [...] The order in the garden, achieved through similar means (mathematics), likewise reflects and reproduces a cosmic order. [...] Because the ordered microcosm reflects the macrocosm, the garden was the ideal vehicle to acquire knowledge of the divine order, a step by step process all things in the visible world were understood as links in a chain leading to the divine."* (Lazzaro, 1990)

But if art, architecture and the gardens are subordinate to the perspective, how is it possible that the plan of the Villa Lante is drawn partly in a rising perspective and partly in elevation? The answer can be given by the general shape of the plan. Thus, by further abstracting its image, one may notice a certain similarity between the general outline of the plan and the shape of a human skull.

If we consider that the fundamental idea of Villa Lante is the retrieval of Paradise through reason, then, in terms of specificity and particularities of studies; especially those concerning the allocation of imagination, reason and memory in the human brain (apud. Clarke and Dewhurst, 1996) made in the Renaissance; through alchemy and through a complex hermeneutical approach, it can be deduced that the carefully drawn plan of the garden itself suggests the message that it wants to convey through the proposed routes – Retrieval/ rediscovery of lost Eden by mathematical reason. Moreover, if we compare the plan of the gardens from Bagnaia with Robert Fludd's drawings from *Utriusque cosmi maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica atque technica historia*, we can notice that there are many correlations between design, theme and the garden.

Although it is probably not the best example, the correlation between the original plan of Villa Lante and Robert Fludd's drawing is used as to emphasize the fact that the shape of the garden was itself a means of expressing the fact that this particular garden was designed as to represent the true path that leads to Paradise.

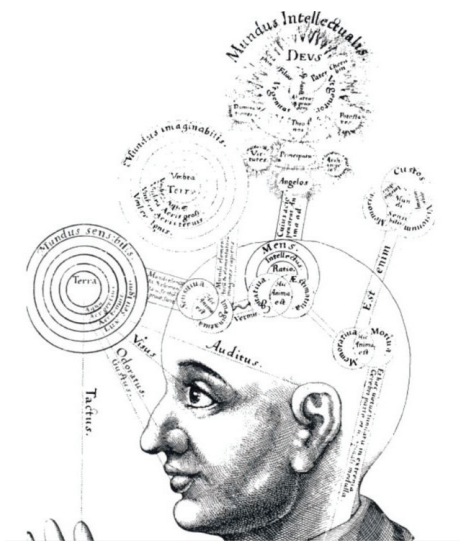


Figure 1. Utriusque cosmi maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica atqve technica historia (Clarke E., Dewhurst K., 1996, p. 42)

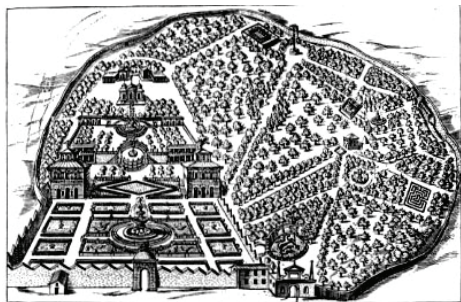


Figure 2. Villa Lante, 16th century plan (www.gardenvisit.com)

In conclusion, Villa Lante can be considered an architectural landscaping microcosm which uses all the artistic means specific to the Italian Mannerism to convey a complex message that hides in fact an allegorical story of man searching for the lost Paradise. Unlike the Villa Lante, Villa Orsini from Bomarzo tries to trick visitors, guiding them through a sacred grove but which, unlike the *bosco* site at Bagnaia, leads the visitors in circles and offer them a single image - the image of the Fall. Villa Orsini does not offer a way out of the sacred forest and no route through which one

can access the Lost Paradise, even if it gives the impression that it will reveal itself to man and that it will be decisive and strong to overcome all the wonders of the Tartarus found on the Villa's route.

"[...] an attempt to banish the melancholy by subjecting oneself to cheerful stimuli (the case of Villa Lante). The other is to do the opposite, namely to surround oneself with sad and gloomy things, thus giving oneself a kind of homeopathic dose of melancholy to stimulate a counter-reaction (Villa Orsini)." (McIntosh, 2005)

### Sacro Bosco or Paradise Lost

"Tu ch'entri qui con mente Parte a parte Et dimmi poi se tante Maraviglie Sien fatte per ingano O pur per arte – You who enter this place, observe it piece by piece and tell me afterwards whether so many marvels were created for deception or purely for art." (McIntosh, 2005)

Just like the message posted at the entrance to the garden says, Villa Orsini will introduce visitors to an unfamiliar world, in an abstract but real, kinetic and aggressive universe.

Unlike Villa Lante, although the Sacro Bosco from Bomarzo has the same subject - namely the route to the retrieval of Paradise, it offers a new vision of this initiation process. Most likely, the route was inspired by the visionary's own life experience, the garden being designed as a monument of commemoration of the tragedies he has surpassed.

Unlike Villa Lante, Villa Orsini was designed entirely as a complex maze (Ehrenfried, 2007). This structure enabled the visionary to use different registers of shapes, sizes and symbols to recreate a false initiation road where nothing that exists seem real, and nothing that is promised or expected will ever exist. In this garden, even nature is no longer subject to its own rules, it is strongly deformed and decomposed – "In Bomarzo, the rules of the world are no longer valid, it is as if this garden wished to escape from the laws of nature." (Ehrenfried, 2007)

As with Villa Lante, the Bomarzo garden offers visitors several possible routes through which they can discover both the universe

transformed through landscaping art and the promised Heaven. Irrespective but the chosen path, going through the labyrinth will never lead to the expected outcome.

*"It is a sacred wood, full of disquieting monuments, some seeming to grow out of the rock itself. The original entrance and axes of movement along its slopes can only be conjectured. The intended sequence of experiences is therefore not clear, perhaps was never meant to be so. The path through the modern entrance is perhaps as good as any other. It leads downward toward the trees, crossing a little watercourse leading farther into the depths of the forest. Directly ahead, standing in the light across a gentle open field, a good, rationally abstract chapel can be seen, columned and domed, but the path does not lead toward it. Instead, it turns away from it down the darkening slope. Soon, hewn out of the natural rock, Hercules rises before us, tearing the giant Cacus to pieces in his hands. He is guarding the garden for us but is markedly alarming, nonetheless. Finally, we come to the deepest part of the forest, and the darkest. There the stream runs into a cleft in the earth and disappears with a gurgling throat. The horrible gargle is surely enhanced by the whale's mouth, all teeth and gullet, into which the living rock at the mouth of the crevice has been carved.*

*Right there, looming over the cavern, an enormous round-eyed tortoise has been carved out of the rock. On its back, the figure of a woman, apparently sounding a trumpet, is placed. We know from the emblem book of the Cavaliere Ripa that she is an image of Fame – Fame lost down here in the depths of the wood, sounding her trumpet in the wild, while high above her the Orsini Castle can be seen shining in the sun. There is no connection between the two, no apparent route from his place to hers. The effect is again bestial – the woman is, after all, right out of the Apocalyptic Vision of St. John, mounted as if in ecstasy upon a beast. [...] just beyond Fame, in the darkness of the forest, a bright light gleams. It is Pegasus, the winged horse, symbol of hope, touched by a ray of sun, rearing up in the darkness. He shows us the only route to follow out of here. It is a sinister-enough path through the wood: Nel mezzo del*

*cammin di nostra vita/ mi ritrovai per una selva oscura.*

*As we follow it upward, we are led further into dream. Goddesses of earth recline like Etruscan matrons in the rock, heavily and somnolent, bearing urns upon their heads. A house appears before us in a sunlit glade. It is leaning steeply into the hill. We mount ever higher beyond it. A war elephant looms up: a castle crowns its back, and a mahout sits upon its head. It is lifting the broken body of a soldier in its trunk. An enormous lizard flares beside it. We are climbing out of the depths, but the images around us are becoming more alarming all the while. At last our dream, the guardian of our sleep, is broken by a figure of true nightmare: a colossal screaming face, as big as a house, demolishing the censor, awaking us as if to our own scream. And then, awake, we are out, standing in the sunshine beside the mercifully abstract chapel we saw before and looking beyond it toward the palace, bathed now in clear white light, but remembering still the woman on the beast deep in the wood of our unaccountable yearning of fame." (Scully, 1991)*

From the description given by Vincent Scully, one can observe the mystical character of the garden and how it is translated into reality as a complex maze.

Although it belongs to the same historical period as Villa Lante, Villa Orsini at Bomarzo offers a new model for the use of the principles of construction of Mannerist gardens and although it approaches the same theme of rediscovering Paradise Lost, it uses many metaphors hidden in the carved stone, conveying a message which is different from the one in Bagnaia and opposite atmosphere to the balanced landscape of Bagnaia.

Seen by Christopher McIntosh as a complex landscape which combines several different themes: "part of it a memorial to Vicino's deceased wife, part therapy for melancholy, part autobiography in stone, part collection of alchemical symbols, part mannerist experiment" (McIntosh, 2005) Villa Orsini from Bomarzo must be seen as a whole, as a sum of elements that make up one story and one life experience - Orsini's tragedies.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As already shown, both Villa Lante and Villa Orsini were designed as to represent the quest for Paradise. The final result of the allegorical processes that make up the two villas offer though two different views over what the road to Paradise and what Eden should look like.

Although very different in this aspect, they tend to be closely related to one another because they tend to use similar images and visual expressions as to emphasize the landscape design philosophy.

To this end, both gardens use similar natural, mythological and/or philosophical themes and elements but interpret their images completely different:

**Pegasus.** While at Villa Lante, the mythological winged horse is inviting the visitor to walk the paths to Paradise and offers him a glimpse of the promised Eden, at Bomarzo, the same animal is placed probably only to annoy the visitor, offering him a false hope. Pegasus is placed in the *bosco* in both gardens, but his presence does not deliver similar messages.

**The watercourse.** Both gardens invite their visitors to walk their paths following a watercourse. At Villa Lante, the water is a physical substitute for the human reason, its "taming" reflects the man's own road to illumination by following the path of reason. This path, and the water that makes it blends itself with a handful of mythological, profane and religious elements, emphasizing the fact that achieving divine reason is a very complex and delicate process that covers all areas of sciences and humanism. On the other hand, the forever untamed watercourses at Bomarzo drive the visitor further and further away from what he hopes he will achieve by following them.

**The Bosco.** While both gardens use woods as mazes and symbols of the chaos and the unknown, the Bagnaia *bosco* is part of the allegorical path from chaos to reason, thus being just part of a visitor's experience. At Bomarzo on the other hand, the forest represents the action itself. Here, the *bosco* is the perfect foreground for the entire spectacle of chaos and deceit.

**The Paradise.** The final expected outcome of the two villas is the (re)discovery of Eden. To this end, Villa Lante offers a more or less straight path that leads to the Paradise, while Villa Orsini only promises it and deceits its visitors by showing them a false hope under the image of the Pegasus.

## CONCLUSIONS

The figuration processes described in the two examples discussed above, provides a comprehensive view of the role of the gardens in the sixteenth century, on the relationship between man and the divine in the same period of time, on the relationship between nature, art and science, etc.

Both Villa Lante and Villa Orsini represent two architectural and horticultural experiments belonging to the Mannerist era in Italy; extremely complex and delicate topics related to the history of art, the art of gardens. They address common themes and even common elements (the sacred forest, Pegasus' statue, etc.) but contain different actions and outcomes, regardless of how they are covered. The two gardens mimic the way to Paradise, but, depending on the chosen route, they can delight, disappoint or madden.

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