Flowering of Eve’s Life in Garden

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Abstract:
Garden of Eve (2011), a novel by Mary A Agria is a sequel to Time in a Garden which deals with the life of the protagonist Eve in the garden. In Time in a Garden, Eve discusses various experiences of loss and gain that she faced in her life from childhood till her husband’s death. And this research explains how the protagonist Eve affected by directed attention fatigue and how she gets relief from fatigue by undergoing Stephen Kaplan’s Attention theory with the help of existences of four qualities in nature may lead to the restoration of directed attention. They are: Being away, fascination, extent and compatibility. Finally it explains how the traditional way of gardening gave her spiritual growth and helped her to resolve all the problems participating in the act of creation with nature.

Summer blooms in Northern Michigan with an intensity that calls out to and holds both locals and visitors alike. Warming days sneak up on us. The greens seem greener. Allium bloom and a couple of days later are past their peak. If we miss a day "walking the garden," we know we are bound to miss something for the season. The pinks and blues and reds and purples of our gardens seem all the brighter against that ocean of green. Million dollar sunsets spread a golden, shimmering wash over the petals like an artist's brush. (Petoskey news)

Garden of Eve (2011), a novel by Mary A Agria is a sequel to Time in a Garden which deals with the life of the protagonist Eve in the garden. In Time in a Garden, Eve discusses various experiences of loss and gain that she faced in her life from childhood till her husband’s death. Likewise in Garden of Eve, Eve shared her experiences of her life. She lost her friends like Dutch, Howard and Margot and her fiancé Adam within fifteen months one by one whom she had considered as her back bone. Eve felt very lonely because all people of her age had gone and she found none to help her in developing the Community Garden. As a widow she gained faith and happiness only by helping the society through the traditional way of gardening. She started to discover her roots. She said, “As a widow and recent retiree, a quiet inner voice had persuaded me it was time to reclaim my roots” (GOE 6). This paved a way for her to concentrate on developing her community and at the same time she also goes to Methodist where the Vicar Ben Gaskill helped her to develop spiritually. Eve was blessed with two daughters named Leslie and Gina, since her two daughters’ married and settled in other states Eve was hopeless and there was no one to care her. So she involved herself in Community Gardening. Eve had noticed that her village was disturbed by many problems. She said,

I speculated how much that showed to anyone unfamiliar with my story. But then anonymity is impossible, collective memory also very long in my tiny northern Michigan
town. In Xenaphon, an ambulance run and the heartbreak that goes with it are front pages news. (GOE6)

She continued her part time job as a journalist under George Herberg for her financial needs, and at the same time she looked after her finance Adam Groft’s nursery business after his death.

Stephen Kaplan’s Directed Attention theory can be applied to Mary A Agria’s novel Garden of Eve (2006). Stephen Kaplan, the Professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan, is a specialist in environmental psychology. He is known for his research on the effect of nature in human relationship. His work “Attention Restoration Theory” explained the benefits of landscape and deals with the various roles of nature and how it helps to restore the human’s health.

Tasks that require mental effort comes under “Directed attention”. Humans give effort of focus to achieve something without any distraction. Because of fascination on the particular work may need an “Effortless attention”. However, after a period of directed attention, people begin to suffer “Attention fatigue”. They become distracted, irritable and impatient if something goes wrong. The concentration they had on a particular task becomes less effective during performance. They become weak mentally. So the same attention is “restored” by changing to a different kind of task where different parts of the brain are used, as in the familiar idiom “a change is a good as a rest” with the help of existences of four qualities in nature may lead to the restoration of directed attention. They are: Being away, fascination, extent and compatibility. Alternatively, exposure to natural environments has psychological benefits including attention restoration.

Being away which literally means “being away” from a mental activity that induces directed attention fatigue. A person with directed attention fatigue always needs to find a way for restoration. In nature a garden which is designed in such a way to “be away” from stressful life. Fascination always comes from content. There are two types of fascination such as “hard” fascination like watching an auto race or wrestling to relax themselves. The second is “Soft” fascination like walking in a natural setting which provides an advantage and enhances the benefits of recovering from directed attention fatigue. In fascination there is a focus or concentration that requires little effort to admire a natural setting such as sun set, snow patterns and the motion of the leaves in the breeze that hold the attention of thoughts. This effortless fascination helps to divert the directed attention fatigue by holding the attention. In this way, the greater level of fascination occupies the mind totally that ends the directed attention fatigue and finally restored. An environment that possesses extent must be rich and coherent which helps the mind to be diverted from directed attention fatigue and restored. And finally Compatibility is a two way street. On the one hand a compatible garden demands, it needs a person’s physical work. Then a garden grows well and provides the happiness by blooming. The natural environment is experienced as particularly high in compatibility.
In this novel the protagonist Eve Brennerman led a happy life with Adam and her community friends. But her directed attention in which she lived happily with her friends was disturbed by the death of Adam. She was depressed with Adam’s death and soon within fifteen months she lost her friends like Dutch, Margot and Horward. Her two daughters also refused to help her and this led her to directed attention fatigue. First, she lost her friends whom she thought that they were the back bone of her life. Sudden change and loss led her to feel loneliness. She says, “Loneliness had become a choice to make. And it was mine and mine alone. Quietly and unbidden, their patience boundless, the faces of family and friends and community had been gathering to fill my emptiness” (GOE57). Second was hopeless when her daughters refused her. In depression she said, “I shall never see happiness again” (GOE 8). But she soon fought her loneliness and tried to regain her vitality by returning to the community garden. The theory states that natural settings are often the preferred destination for extended restorative opportunities. Eve was away from her fatigue by spending time in the garden. She kept her busy by gardening and writing garden tips in Gazette to forget her loneliness. She said,

These days I find myself learning to love this unsettled time of year, to fret less and enjoy more. Gardening is the most popular hobby in the world. Odd, though, how we choose to talk about it. Deeply as we may love our garden, we say we are going to ‘work’ not ‘play’ in it. At the end of the day for a lot of gardeners, the toughest thing is to cultivate the capacity to enjoy, sitting back quietly on our heels and smelling the roses. (GOE 234)

These lines proved that gardening restored her from her directed attention fatigue and it allowed her to keep away from the thoughts of her loved ones whom she had lost.

Eve was fascinated by nature and that taught her patience to face gain and loss through different kinds of climate. She started to accept her loss and step forward to lead a life gathering new friends in Community garden. She said,

Day by day my garden grows, filled with names and faces I never even met a season ago. I came across some wonderful poetry the other day, Psalms 92 that summed up that sense of joy better than I ever could. Cedars still grow and flourish among the ancient rocks and crags of Lebanon. They are among the slowest growing and oldest of trees. It takes some 40 years before the fertile seeds develop. Symbols of eternity, the cedars are still green and full of life to the end, shelter among their ancient rocks… Cultivating relationships takes time and patience. (GOE171)

The above lines proved that Eve was fascinated towards nature and through nature she learnt patience of life. This fascination on nature that grasped her attention and led her to a comfortable life and thus she restored from directed fatigue. To know about nature she extended her area for gardening. She created Community garden and she made Adam Groft’s nursery business as a natural setting tourist spot. She learnt through history that her ancestors gave importance to gardening because they considered it
traditional. “Traditionally, green is considered a symbol of springs, of new life and growth. Of hope. A subtle reminder, the time for flowering has begun” (GOE 239). Hence she concentrated on the traditional way of gardening that leads her to extend her area and that allowed her to get rid from directed fatigue. Spending time in nature she gained her Compatibility of life. She expended her effort on gardening so it thrived and made a happier. Bea said, “Even if folks don’t always appreciate the distinction between goldenrod shoots and prairie asters, there’s something about digging in the dirt. As kid we loved it. As adults we feel we need an excuse” (GOE122).

When Eve and her friends fulfilled the needs of the garden, the garden started to fulfill their needs by helping them to forget their worries by blooming flowers unexpectedly. Like meadow flowers which individually seemed to be odorless but all together perfume the air they started to shine by accepting and balancing both loss and gain forming a community. Good understanding with nature provided her a great relationship with nature. She said, “I had known love and grief that passes understanding. “Like the Michigan waters lapping at my feet, I too am slowly but inexorably moving on. My heart aches at the thought, but that too I know must pass” (GOE 232). Thus she regained from directed attention fatigue cause by the death of her friends.

The research taken for study endeavors to prove through the protagonist Eve, that today’s people are at workplaces with espresso machine, ping – pong table but still leading lonely life causing depression and feelings of stress. There are many solutions to get away from this depression of life, but a foremost choice for relief from depression is gardening. Nature gives the brain the much required break from everyday overstimulation and pictures of scenic, natural landscape heighten activity with happy memories. A garden is designed such a way to give social support for gardeners, provision of privacy and control, opportunity for physical activity and fascination which provides greatest possibility of reducing stress and restorative experiences. The purpose of this study is to determine that stress people can still reap some brain – boosting benefits or restorative experiences without leaving their house allotting small area inside the compound wall of their house.

Works cited