The Architecture of Paradise

Survivals of Eden and Jerusalem

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Mankind has lost its dignity, but Art has
recovered it and conserved it in significant
stones.

(SCHILLER, *On Aesthetic Education*)

Paradise is a strange land but a familiar presence; few have been there, but many people have an idea of what it is like. As a garden at one end of time and a city at the other, Paradise is in one sense remote from worldly concerns. But Eden has not been allowed to rest in memory, nor Jerusalem to choose its time of arrival. The study of Paradise must take up not only the two scriptural versions, or models, but their re-creations in both simple and complex or synthesized forms. These re-creations exist within the time of human history and the matrices of human societies, and they consist both of words and of stones; that is, both literature and architecture have maintained Paradise in our lives as a real presence. In both media the translations, or re-creations, are both literal and metaphoric.

Paradise, in all senses of the word, is the most striking place I can discover where an immaterial vision and a material structure or system of relationships are brought together and depend upon each other. That relationship and that dependence exist in literary versions of Paradise that incorporate to a greater or lesser extent the description of Paradise as a physical entity, whether garden, city, or a combination of both; and that relationship exists in architecture that

pretends to define or enclose heavenly space or to translate to earth the properties of heaven.

The architecture of my title is thus real architecture, whether actually built or existing in literature, and it is the subject of this book to the extent that the relationship of craft to nature is the subject. The translation of the archetypal models of Paradise into various syntheses, literal and metaphoric, verbal and material, provides a frame of reference within which is continued the struggle to define what "nature" is and what behavior is natural for men. The contradiction between garden and city and the complicated kinds of syntheses between them are pointers to the ambiguous moral status of craft as well as efforts to resolve that ambiguity.

At no one point but as a general trend, Paradise ceases to be religious in conception and becomes something else—something that may be political, economic, ethical, or erotic, according to the human capacity or discipline of thought understood to be the key to spiritual and material fulfillment. The search for Paradise is thus an effort to discover the correct relationship between man, nature, and craft; and as a phenomenon both of secular literature and of urban planning and design, "Paradise" devolves into versions of arcadia and utopia, the one an Eden, the other a Jerusalem—to modify Renato Poggioli's compelling formula—without theology.[1] What an unreligious society expects in the way of a perfect or perfected state of being generally requires something from each model. I am only secondarily concerned with formal literary, architectural, and political analyses of either arcadian or utopian modes of thought and action, but I shall try to show the persistence and interrelatedness of the hortulan and urban models of Paradise and to show that two active and intellectual disciplines, literature and architecture, are penetrated by a single, polarized metaphor or metaphorical mode of thought.

The existence of several distinguished and recent studies of Eden makes it unnecessary for me to dwell upon the typological relationship between the first garden and all that have followed. In arguing,

however, for the ascendancy of an architecture over a horticulture of Paradise, I shall depart from the paradigms set forth in the work of Stanley Stewart and Terry Comito.[2] Not all but much of ideal or paradisal gardening after Eden is walled, and the walled gardens are their subject; because both *garden* and its Hebrew equivalent *gan* descend from verbs meaning to guard or to protect, all gardens might seem to be walled. But the Yahwist garden of Genesis 2 is not, and the word *paradise*, connoting more specifically an enclosed park,[3] does not occur in its cognate Hebrew form, *pardes*, before Nehemiah 2:8 and was never adopted by the rabbinic texts of the Talmud.[4] In the first century A.D., Philo Judaeus wrote of Paradise only that "it is a dense place full of all kinds of trees";[5] "a grove" (ἄλσος), echoes St. Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century, "planted with leafy trees";[6] "a most beautiful place in the East, in which [were] trees of various kinds" is the simple formula in the twelfth-century *Elucidarium* of Honorius of Autun.[7]

Exegetical tradition, however, tended eventually to assimilate the distinctive but unenclosed garden of Genesis to the enclosed one of Canticles (Song of Solomon) and both to the walled city of Revelation. Stanley Stewart's pursuit of a secret garden that manifested itself across centuries of art and literature refers us to the important archetype generated from this conflation but not to the first garden itself, which was no secret—as Satan discovers when Uriel readily directs him to Eden in *Paradise Lost* (III, 722ff.).[8] John Bunyan noted the vulnerability of the garden of Genesis and cited it to justify the fact that the Paradise to come is urban:

> Adam, you know, was once so rich and wealthy, that he had the garden of Eden, the paradise of pleasure, yea, and also the whole world to boot, for his inheritance; but mark, in all his glory he was without a wall; wherefore presently, even at the very first assault of the adversary, he was not only worsted as touching his person and standing, but even stripped of all his treasure, his paradise taken from him. . . .[9]

1

Eden with walls and interior architecture, from Pol, Jan, and Herman Limbourg, *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, early fifteenth century.

2

Eden without walls, coterminous with a continent, in a Lucas Cranach(?) illustration for Genesis in Martin Luther's German Bible, 1534.

3

Eden without walls, as a slice of landscape, in Hieronymus Bosch's synoptic representation from *The Last Judgment*, left panel, ca. 1500.

Pastoral societies are conspicuously vulnerable; strangers penetrate the arcadia of Sidney's romance, and brigands ravage the arcadians of Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*. By contrast, utopian visions typically ensure security through elaborate fortifications or safe distancing. The presence of a wall of some kind, artificial or natural, around the actual and metaphorical gardens of literature and around the medieval claustral space and the Renaissance plot is the primary architectural event that marks a synthesis between Eden and its rival archetype. In tracing the relationships of opposition and accommodation between garden and city, we shall consequently find compromised Edens, paradisal gardens to some degree assimilated to architectural phenomena like walls, temples, or cities. In instances where the garden must dominate, the iconography of Paradise is of a special kind, one that constitutes a definition of the proper relationship of craft to nature; here architecture is accommodated when it submits to perceived laws of nature or laws of the nature of materials of construction, or insofar as it may be identified with the lives of virtuous inhabitants. This manner of construction and the ethical tradition of hostility to material display and to craft make up one of the two governing conceptions of paradisal or ideal architecture; in conjunction with the opposing model, of building distinguished by richness of surface and sophistication of form, this conception will lead us through literary and theoretical versions of Paradise, arcadia, and utopia to the modern linkage of secular virtue with city planning in its large sense, the sense of Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City and of Le Corbusier's *ville radieuse*.

A recent inquiry into the scientific and utopian assumptions of modern architecture notes that "the ecstatic component of modern architecture has received a comparatively insufficient attention."[10] The ecstatic component in building, which descends mainly from the idea of a heavenly city and from the attribution to architecture of heavenly properties, is my subject. Like *Collage City* by Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, my study is syncretistic and cannot pretend to

touch every base in literature and architecture or in the related areas of moral philosophy that define the relationship of nature, man, and craft. The line or chain of transmission from mythic to metaphorical models of Paradise is neither single nor direct; more familiar in the examination of the sources of modern architecture and more clearly documented is a pattern of romantic scientific/utopian thought. It is my belief that the wide range of the present study, though diffusing the pedigree of modern architecture through many areas of inquiry and achievement, will contribute to an understanding of its ultimate source.