

# Exploring The Garden as an “Interstitial Space” For Women in Francis Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* and Shahrnush Parsipur’s *Women Without Men*

Onur EKLER 

(Corresponding Author- Sorumlu Yazar)

Department of Foreign Languages,  
Hatay Mustafa Kemal University, School  
of Foreign Languages, Hatay, Türkiye  
Hatay Mustafa Kemal Üniversitesi,  
Yabancı Diller Yüksek Okulu, Yabancı  
Diller Bölümü, Hatay, Türkiye  
onurekler@gmail.com



Received/Geliş Tarihi 19.06.2024  
Revision/Revizyon Tarihi 20.01.2025  
Accepted/Kabul Tarihi 11.02.2025  
Publication Date/Yayın Tarihi 25.06.2025

## Cite this article:

Ekler, O. (2025). Exploring The Garden as an  
“Interstitial Space” For Women in Francis  
Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*  
and Shahrnush Parsipur’s *Women  
Without Men*. *Journal of Literature and  
Humanities*, 74, 33-42.

## Atıf:

Ekler, O. (2025). Francis Hodgson Burnett’in  
*Gizli Bahçe*’sinde ve Shahrnush  
Parsipur’un *Erkeksiz Kadınlar*’ında  
Bahçeyi Kadınlar İçin Bir “Kesişme Alanı”  
Olarak Keşfetmek. *Edebiyat ve Beşeri  
Bilimler Dergisi*, 74, 33-42.



Content of this journal is licensed under a  
Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial  
4.0 International License.

Francis Hodgson Burnett’in *Gizli Bahçe*’sinde ve Shahrnush  
Parsipur’un *Erkeksiz Kadınlar*’ında Bahçeyi Kadınlar İçin Bir  
“Kesişme Alanı” Olarak Keşfetmek

## Abstract

This article is an inquiry dedicated to exploring the function of the garden as an interstitial space for the anti-Oedipal female characters in Francis Hodgson Burnett’s famous novel, *The Secret Garden* (1911), Shahrnush Parsipur’s *Women Without Men* (1989). This inquiry is grounded on two complementary levels. As it examines the female characters’ constant exposure to systematic victimization in the restricting frames of the patriarchal dominions of Victorian England and the Iranian Regime, it also sheds light on both Burnett and Parsipur’s intentional design of the garden as a liminal zone at the nexus where magic and real converge. This article highlights the intersecting points concerning woman’s position and garden in both works though not using a direct comparative method. To show the universality of the problems concerning subjugated women in patriarchal societies, this article intentionally takes on two works across borders, having different socio-historical contexts. The originality of this article lies in the exploration regarding how both works map out the garden as a female space in contrast to the traditional view of the garden as a place that has served man’s pleasures.

**Keywords:** Woman, Space, Heterotopia, Interstice, Garden

## Öz

Bu makale, Francis Hodgson Burnett’in ünlü romanı *Gizli Bahçe* (1911) ve Shahrnush Parsipur’un *Erkeksiz Kadınlar* (1989) adlı eserlerindeki Ödipal karşıtı kadın karakterler için bir kesişme alanı olarak bahçenin işlevini keşfetmeyi amaçlayan bir araştırmadır. Bu araştırma birbirini tamamlayan iki temel hususa dayanır. Viktorya dönemi İngiltere’sinin ve İran Rejimi’nin ataerki egemenliklerinin kısıtlayıcı çerçeveleri içinde, kadın karakterlerin sürekli olarak sistematik mağduriyete maruz kalmalarını bir yandan incelerken hem Burnett’in hem de Parsipur’un büyüünün ve gerçeğin birleştiği bir noktada bahçeyi bir kesişme bölgesi olarak tasarlamalarına da ışık tutar. Bu makale, doğrudan karşılaştırmalı bir yöntem kullanmasa da her iki eserde de kadının konumu ve bahçeyle ilgili kesişen noktaları vurgular. Ataerki toplumlarda ezilen kadınlarla ilgili sorunların evrenselliğini göstermek için bu makale, farklı sosyo-tarihsel bağlamlara sahip, sınırları aşan iki eseri ele alır. Bu makalenin özgünlüğü, bahçeyi erkeklerin zevklerine hizmet eden bir yer olarak gören geleneksel görüşün aksine, her iki eserin de bahçeyi kadınlara özgü bir mekân olarak nasıl tasvir ettiklerini göstermede yatar.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kadın, Mekân, Heterotopya, Kesişme, Bahçe

### Introduction

The literary mappings of mythical gardens or earthly paradise have frequently given an evocative sense of pleasure-taking space, mainly devised for man. Though judgemental this assumption may be, many examples across borders in religious and literary history corroborate it. Genesis Chapters 1 and 2 of *the Bible* mention how God planted a garden primarily for Adam, his first creation (*King James Bible*, 1996). In the *Koran's* 32<sup>nd</sup> verse of Surah An-Naba, gardens, vineyards, and maidens are promised for the righteous man in heaven (p. 583). In his essay "On Gardens," Francis Bacon writes: "God Almighty first planted a garden. And indeed, it is the purest of human pleasures. It is the greatest refreshment to the spirits of man" (Hardyment, 2014, p. 22). Moreover, the legendary fourteenth-century Persian poet Hafez-e Shirazi refers to the intoxicating power of the garden for the male speaker in the following lines of his poem, *The Garden*:

*The garden is breathing out the air of paradise today,  
Toward me, a friend with a sweet nature, and this wine. (Hardyment, 2014, p. 20)*

Another example is *Arabian Nights*, which features how a garden with all its riches and women serve for the entertainment of a cruel king:

*When evening drew near I opened the door of the first chamber and entering it found myself in a place like one of the pleasaunces of paradise. It was a garden with trees of freshest green and ripe fruits of yellow sheen, and its birds were singing clear and keen, and rills ran wimpling through the fair terrene. Then I looked upon the pear whose taste surpasseth sherbet and sugar, and the apricot whose beauty striketh the eye with admiration, as if she were a polished ruby. (Burton, 2001, p. 102)*

Similar to the female evocation of the garden in the above lines of *The Arabian Nights*, Saadi, a thirteenth-century Persian poet, metaphorically compares the private garden of the king to a charming woman in the story 34 of his famous work, *Gulistan*:

*Its red roses were like the cheeks of belles,  
Its hyacinths like the ringlets of mistresses. (Sadi, 2018, p. 76)*

The examples mentioned above offer some religious and literary reflections on the function of mythical gardens as entertaining and body/soul-refreshing spaces for men and women's subjugated position within this space. It is perceived as a male-dominated zone where women have been reduced to the position of objects. In other words, women occupy the space not as free-willed subjects but the pleasurable objects on the male axis. In this sense, the garden in the examples above functions as a power-mediated space shaped by the patriarchal structure. The primary question is whether the garden can be a liberatory heterotopia for women to deconstruct and reshape their positions.

Not until modernist times, the mythical garden where a woman's body served for man's pleasure been subverted into a redemptory space or a zone of escape for women—to express, in Samuel Reynolds Hole's words, from "the miserable dullness of common life into the splendid regions of imagination and romance" (Hardyment, 2014, p. 155). To aesthetically teach this subverted notion to their readers, particularly to fellow woman readers, some modernist woman writers attempt to de-territorialize the preconceived understanding of the mythical garden where a woman's body was seen as the object of pleasure by alternatively presenting it as an interstitial space between real and magic. This alternative space allows women to make themselves out of the clashing forces through a glimpse of self-awakening by breaking the coercive norms of society.

Though not directly comparative in style, this article aims to show the parallelism concerning woman's position and garden as a liberatory space in Francis Hodgson Burnett's famous novel, *The Secret Garden* (1911), Shahrnush Parsipur's *Women Without Men* (1989), one of Shahrnush Parsipur's most acclaimed works. To corroborate the universal aspect of this argument that concerns all women beyond borders, this study intentionally focuses on two novels different from one another in terms of socio-historical/cultural context. Both novels can be regarded as dramatic examples that map out the mythic garden as a heterotopic space at the nexus of magic and reality. It is the space where women can subvert the dominant values of the patriarchal society that have subdued their creative potential. Both Burnett and Parsipur's devise of a mythical garden is unique in that the garden in both novels functions as a sort of interstitial space, that is, an in-between space where magic and real collide and negotiate new possibilities for the women. The methodology of this study is firstly to present the theoretical background in order to familiarize readers with the terminology necessary for the intended study of both works. Subsequently, it explores the garden's function as an interstice in Burnett's *The Secret Garden* and Parsipur's *Women without Men*.

### The Theoretical Background of the Study

Foucault argues a paradoxical notion of space theory called heterotopia. He first mentions it in his work, *Order of Things* (1966). However, this term drew great attention in academic circles when he related it to spatial design in a lecture titled "Of Other Spaces" (1967). Foucault defines it as a real, material space in society that operates as other since its functioning is against normative standards. In Hetherington's words, heterotopia is described as spaces of alternate ordering. Heterotopia organize a bit of the social world in a way different to that which surrounds them. That alternate ordering marks them out as Other and allows them to be seen as an example of an alternative way of doing things (1997, p. viii).

To better comprehend this challenging, all-embracing term, it is essential to have insight into Lefebvre's three determining spatial designs in producing a social space in his famous theoretical work, *The Production of Space* (1974). Lefebvre posits that the first space is the spatial practice or the perceived space linked to people's daily routines or basic social activities. It is related to the material aspect of life (Soja, 1996, p. 66). The second space is, to Lefebvre, the conceived space, which is the architecturally designed space produced by city planners or authorities (p. 67). The conceived space has a well-planned system that is functional and strictly regulated by the discursive patterns of hegemonic authority. Unlike the profiteering aspect of the conceived space having a predetermined network shaped by the ruling authorities, Lefebvre suggests the lived or differential space as a liberatory site for resistance against any controlling mechanism (p. 67). It is the space that acts outside the existing standards of society but is still a part of real life. This space matters since it creates an alternative path for the ones in the periphery position to re-forge their subjectivity. What is worth noting in Lefebvre's theory of spatial triad is that socio-economic relations constantly shape spatial fluidity.

Unlike Lefebvre's dialectical notion of space based on the changing social and material relations, Foucault's heterotopia is an all-embracing space that includes Lefebvre's spatial triad and re-interprets it in the power axis. Foucault attributes different functions to this paradoxical space by identifying six principles that define heterotopia. These determining principles offer a simultaneity of clashing ideas related to heterotopia. It can be a site of power-mediated control space or anarchy. In other words, the heterotopic space may be a regulatory space through discipline and punishment, such as schools and prisons, or a liberatory space, such as gardens and carnivals, which enables the underprivileged to reshape their selves and environments. Therefore, delimiting this study to the discussion of the garden as a liberatory heterotopia excluding the power-oriented spaces such as the disciplining institutions is noteworthy due to the ambiguous nature of the term mentioned above.

In discussing the third principle of heterotopia, Foucault illustrates the Persian garden as a sacred heterotopic space that includes the totality of the world. This garden, long supposed to be a paradise on earth, has become a motif widely used in different cultures and religions (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986, p. 25). Alternative to the centripetal understanding of power-oriented gardens, Foucault offers a garden as other space and compares it to an umbilicus, a threshold of convergence and divergence of the things (p. 25). It is a liminal space where myth and real conjoin. In this sense, a heterotopic garden may function as a rhizomic space that negotiates new possibilities for a new life without an assumed hierarchy since the rhizome for Deleuze and Guattari is free-flowing and nomadic (1988, p. 28). To Deleuze and Guattari, this nomadic space welcomes differences and celebrates multiplicity (p. 13). In Marc Seems' words, it is a site of escape for those who are "oedipalized or neuroticized at home, at school, at work" (1983, p. xx). The subaltern people, oppressed by race, gender, class, and religion in various spheres of life, flow into this alternative space to de-oedipalise the yoke of authority that has long silenced them. For this reason, the following sections offer a detailed analysis of the garden as an interstitial space for women to negotiate over challenging issues that affect their position in contemporary society in Burnett's *The Secret Garden* and Parsipur's *Women without Men*.

### Francis Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* As The "Interstitial Space" For Women

Francis Hodgson Burnett (1849-1924) was a British-American novelist and playwright whose works in the children's category, such as *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1885-86), *Little Princess* (1905), *The Secret Garden* (1911), brought her worldwide recognition. Many critics praise her writing style. Henry C. Vedder, one of these critics, finds the manner "in which she says things" praiseworthy (1894, p. 163). Recchio, another critic, notes that her writing style bears the prints of Dickens, Thackeray, Brontes, and Gaskell (2020, p. 23). Despite the positive reception of her works, her financial priorities, as Threadgold (1979) argues, side-tracked her literary potential to be among the ranks of these authors (p. 113). In addition to Threadgold's point, Keyser finds another possible reason concerning her failure to actualize her literary potential is Burnett's sacrifice for her duties to her family (1983, p. 10). Burnett's biographer, Ann Thwaite, supports this view, describing her as a young married woman "obviously trying her best ... to appear as the nineteenth century's ideal of womanhood" (1991, p. 52). Overwhelmed by the economic anxieties and the social expectations from a Victorian/Edwardian woman, which stifle her creativity, Burnett still stands as an eminent figure in the literary world. As well as the other works above, particularly

her masterpiece, *The Secret Garden*, serialized in monthly installments in the American magazine from 1910-11, helped her to secure her place in the literary world. To Thwaite, most critics appreciate it as “a tale of literary craftsmanship” (1991, p.209). They find it “richer than its predecessors in thematic development and symbolic resonance” (Gymnich & Lichterfeld, 2012, p. 8). Threadgold binds its lasting success to the author’s strengths, such as her keen observation, her storytelling power, and her unleashed creativity (1979, p. 119).

Although widely acclaimed in the children’s category by the reviewers, facilitating the multiple-layered readings, *The Secret Garden*, as Gymnich and Lichterfeld discuss, also attracts adult readers (2012, p. 8). When read through adults’ lenses, the novel opens up various forms of criticism, including eco-feminist, postcolonial and psychoanalytical studies, some of which mainly focus on, as Krüger argues, “constructions of childhood, Victorian and Edwardian values, class ideology, or the garden as a metaphor” (2012, p. 69). Among these studies, the enigmatic function of the garden has been widely reviewed since it gives rise to different interpretations. Danielle Price, for instance, defines the garden in the novel in the accepted norms of Victorian society as “an extension of the domestic” feminine space (2001, p. 7). She claims that nurturing gardens and women hold a common ground. She says, “To produce perfection in women and nature requires enclosure, imprisonment, and instruction so that ultimately they will provide beauty and comfort” (p. 5). Phyllis B. Koppes imagines the garden in the novel as a georgic landscape of mind, associating it with a dream-like space (1978, p. 203). Jane Darcy considers it a fictional trope where Burnett can ease the tragic loss of her child, Lionel, by giving him a perpetual life in the character Colin (2009, p. 76). Ruth Y. Jenkins features the spatial significance of the garden in the novel, which “acknowledges the socially abject” by offering alternatives to socially accepted identities (2011, p. 429). Raimund Borgmeier examines the garden within the romantic tradition, highlighting its healing power and a symbolic place for liberty (2012, p. 24). Imke Lichterfeld focuses on the garden’s impact on the characters in the novel, partly supporting her argument in an eco-feminist context (2012, p. 28). In addition to these enlightening studies on Burnett’s mapping of the secret garden in the novel, this article offers an alternative reading regarding the garden’s function for women. As noted in the introduction of this article, it argues that Burnett maps the garden in the novel as an interstitial space where a woman can discover her transformative power at the nexus of magic and real by deconstructing the Victorian notion of the garden, to Price, a space for woman’s proper cultivation.

*The Secret Garden*, as Price notes, was written when gardening was a popular activity and gardens were related to feminine space (2001, p. 4). Burnett subverts the passive relationship between gardens and women as she adopts, in Thwaite’s words, “the New Thought, [...], the new realization of the power of the mind” (1991, p. 221). Although her mapping of the secret garden is greatly inspired by her memories of the Edwardian gardens in Salford, in the Great Maytham Hall in Kent, and Manchester at a time when she read *Jane Eyre*, it is still possible to trace the effect of this “New Thought” on her revolutionary perception of the secret garden not as a feminine space, which implies woman’s subservience to male superiority in Victorian norms, but as a heterotopic trope that implies an interstitial space for self-becoming. Burnett uses the novel’s secret garden at Misselwaite’s manor as a magical-real space for the protagonist, Mary Lennox’s physical and psychological rebirth. The secret garden helps her to explore the hidden power of her un-domesticated nature.

Born in India, Mary Lennox is a feeble, unhealthy, and fretful girl, neglected by her uncaring parents. The heterodiegetic narrator of the novel describes her as “the most disagreeable-looking child ever” (Burnett, 2004, p. 7). Left alone after the death of her parents in the cholera times, she is taken to stay with her uncle, Craven Archibald, at Misselwaite manor in England, the description of which evokes Thornfield in *Jane Eyre* (Gymnich & Lichterfeld, 2012, p. 10). Mary’s Indian background and her associated pessimism seem to be Burnett’s intentional devise in order to show Mary’s voyage for self-growth from a miserable character with a sulky face, devoid of affection in India, to a caring child whose life energy is fully restored in her relationship with the secret garden in Misselwaite, England.

For a careful eye like Koppes, the secret garden is a spatial reflection of Mary’s consciousness (1978, p. 203). Like Mary, as Koppes argues, the secret garden has suffered neglect for ten years after Mrs. Craven accidentally died in the garden (1978, p. 203). Despite the neglect, the untrimmed, wild garden attracts Mary and invigorates her soul. She feels more peaceful and high-spirited, as the narrator says, “She was beginning to like to be out of doors; she no longer hated the wind but enjoyed it. She could run faster and longer, and she could skip up to a hundred” (Burnett, 2004, p. 87). Mary feels stronger physically and mentally, unlike her times in India, where she used to shut herself indoors, feeling weak and sick. She says, “I’m growing fatter, said Mary, and I’m growing stronger. I used always to be tired. When I dig, I’m not tired at all. I like to smell the earth when it’s turned up” (p. 102).

Burnett attributes a unique role to the secret garden in Misselwaite. Unlike Price’s view of the garden as a domestic space for women, the secret garden, as Gymnich and Lichterfeld argue, represents an undomesticated feminist space that enables Mary to discover the hidden maternal power of nature. As a liminal site with subversive power, the garden guides her to explore the alternative path to power and re-forge her subjectivity. When Mary feels overwhelmed by nature’s enigmatic

power in the garden with the help of Dickon, the animal charmer, and his mother, Mrs. Sowerby, she is thoroughly excited by the idea of growing things. In her first meeting with Mr. Craven, when she is asked to have toys and dolls, her answer is to have “a bit of earth” (p. 115). To Mr. Craven’s amazement, Mary wishes “to plant seeds in—to make things grow—to see them come alive” (p. 114). These lines imply Mary’s change from a wretched girl with an unfriendly nature into a maternal character, caring for things beyond herself. She not only cures herself but also begins to heal all around, thanks to the regenerative power of the secret garden.

Mary’s self-transformation is best noticeable in her active engagement with her hypochondriac cousin Colin, a seemingly disabled, bad-tempered boy confined to his room due to an unknown illness. Colin is made to believe that he suffers from a deadly illness, especially by his uncle-doctor Craven, the next heir to Mr. Archibald Craven’s inheritance after Colin. After his mother dies, his father stays away from him. His unhappiness, his lack of love, and his constant exposure to dying soon because of the growing hunchback he thinks he has on his back turn him into a selfish, grumpy boy who suffers from tantrums that are unbearable to anybody at the manor. However, Mary revives his spirits, telling him that he has no lump on his back and no illness:

*There is not a single lump there! she said at last. [...], now that an angry unsympathetic little girl insisted obstinately that he was not as ill as he thought he was he actually felt as if she might be speaking the truth. (p. 283)*

Mrs. Medlock, in her talk to Dr. Craven, cannot hide her surprise about Mary’s bewitching effect on Colin’s tantrum: “That plain sour-faced child that’s almost as bad as himself has just bewitched him. How she has done it there’s no telling” (p. 179). Mary believes Colin is not ill and wants him to feel nature’s mysteries in the secret garden. Therefore, with Dickon’s help, she takes Colin to the secret garden. She helps him to feel the creative life force in the garden that will cure him, as Lichterfeld notes, passing him her experiences in the secret garden. Colin feels reinvigorated and more powerful (2012, p. 35). Both Mary and Colin think there is magic in the garden:

*There is Magic in there—good Magic, you know, Mary. I am sure there is.*

*“So am I,” said Mary.*

*“Even if it isn’t real Magic,” Colin said, “we can pretend it is. Something is there something!”*

*“It’s Magic,” said Mary, “but not black. It’s as white as snow.” (Burnett, 2004, p. 219)*

As Thomas Recchio notes, magic is associated with the vital energies circling in nature that interconnect everything to everything else (2020, p. 161). As he further discusses, the magic here helps Colin to heal “his failed relation” to the world (p. 161). Mary plays an active role in this recovery process, becoming an intermediary between nature and Colin. Burnett’s mapping of the garden at the interstice, where magic and real collide, is evidence of the transformative power of the garden as a female space. She celebrates Mary’s powerful presence in the secret garden. Mrs. Sowerby’s attribution of Colin’s recovery to Mary may corroborate this argument. “My word!” she said. “It was a good thing that little lass came to th’ Manor. It’s been th’ makin’ o’ her an’ th’ savin’ o’ him” (Burnett, 2004, p. 232). Mary deconstructs the dominant culture’s values by temporarily disrupting the binary logic between man and woman in the magical aura of the garden. The garden that blends real and magic functions as a dialogic space, which empowers Mary’s self-expression and enables her to create a polyphony of voices from different classes, transcending the class consciousness in the rigid societal structure of Victorian England and India.

Although Burnett’s take on the secret garden is unique and different from other inquiries, the function of the secret garden as an in-between space between magic and real where a woman can uncover her creative potential in her newly developed relations to the garden by questioning her denigrated position in the dominant patriarchal culture is not limited to a specific literary discourse. The garden’s function as an interstice for women also manifests itself in various literary texts in different parts of the world where women’s creative potential has been perceived as a threat to the patriarchal order. The following section will shift to Eastern literary discourse to back up this point and discuss a well-known Iranian censored novel, Parsipur’s *Women Without Men*, in terms of Parsipur’s use of the garden as an interstitial space.

### **The Garden As The “Interstitial Space” For Women In Shahrnur Parsipur’s *Women Without Men***

Shahrnur Parsipur (1946-) is a contemporary Iranian writer in exile who has expressed intellectual antagonism against the oppressive Regime on women in Iran. Risking persecution, imprisonment, censorship, political exile, and even her life, she has aesthetically and politically attempted to inspire and awaken women concerning human rights and other social issues, particularly in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. As Talattof rightly argues, her consciousness-raising efforts in her writings have “contributed to the rise of feminist discourse in Iran” (2004, p. 46). Although most of her notable works, including *Touba and The Meaning of Night* (1989) and *Women without Men* (1989), were subjected to censorship,

she has stood firm and showed a particular uneasiness around the intentional pacification of women under the coercive societal rules imposed by the Regime in Iran. In her oeuvre, like a clinician-writer in Deleuzian terms, she has diagnosed the Iranian woman's fear of sexual taboos and matters that have silenced and denigrated her. Guarding against the sexual taboos eclipsing women's creativity, Parsipur aims to blur the contours of Iranian society with her celebrative tone on sexual matters and her consequential advocacy of sexual freedom in her works. Parsipur's take on this critical issue as a symptom of a disease that would potentially be deadly for Iranian women over time implicates her prescient vision of the growing problems even today's women have had to face. In her article "George Orwell and I," she expresses that there is a saturation point for deceit, fear, torture, and oppression and that one has to make one's path, destroying the blockage (2013, p. 50). This fact evidences why her works create a melting pot enabling the dissolution of Iranian society's rigid lines. She renders it possible at the nexus where real and magic converge. This negotiation space created at the threshold between real and magic in her works is Parsipur's intentional device so that, to borrow from Cixous, women may "break out of the snare of silence" (1976, p. 881).

Set in the summer of 1953, just before the coup attempt on the democratically elected prime minister of Iran, Mossadegh, the novella focuses on the lives of five women of different stations. Juxtaposing the coup in democratic Iran with the suppression of women at the hands of the male oppressors then and now, particularly in the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution, Parsipur criticizes the fascistic mind, especially concerning gender relations that have haunted Iran on different grounds.

In the loosely connected episodes in the novella, Parsipur envisages the mythic garden as a line of flight for these victimized women. Although Parsipur embarks on a quest to recuperate her Oedipal sufferings in the novella, she is not trapped. Thanks to the different types of female characters, she plunges further into a nomadic quest through constant de-territorialization by pushing the furthest limits of the societal coercive norms. She actualizes it through the female characters' lines of flights from the stifling social norms—which have caused their subjugation—to a mythical garden as an in-between space where their long-suppressed creative energy would possibly be unleashed.

The first character, Mahdokth, a former teacher, unleashes her energy by becoming a tree in the garden. Her obsession with protecting her virginity—a way of honoring the codes of the society designated for the proper role of a woman—makes her suffer from a neurotic crisis. Upon witnessing an old gardener's harassment of a 15-year-old girl, she feels distraught by this outrageous act. Her worries have intensified since she knows that the male figures will beat the girl to death if this case is exposed. She says, "It would have been convenient if the girl had gotten pregnant. The brothers would have ganged up on her and beaten her to death. That would have been nice. Then, she wouldn't mislead the children" (Parsipur, 2011, p. 15). She holds her social role so unconsciously that she wants the harassed girl to suffer for fear that she should be an improper role model for her children. Her neurotic worries bring her to a point when her becoming a tree, she assumes, would make her evergreen and untouched. Therefore, she plants herself as a tree in the garden: "As a tree, she would sprout offshoots that would spread to the entire orchard and cover it so thickly that they would have to cut down all the cherry trees to make room for the Mahdokth tree" (p. 15).

Transcending the rational boundaries and transporting the readers to a conflux of magical and realist dimensions, Parsipur delicately and ironically touches on the issue of virginity as a sexual taboo for Iranian women. As in Mahdokth's case, Munis and Fa'iza are too obsessed with virginity. In a fervent talk on virginity, they bring on different views on whether it is a membrane or an orifice. Through the seemingly vital discussion between Munis and Fa'iza, Parsipur implicates how Iranian women are trapped, wasting their intellectual capacity on taking such sexual taboos into the center of their lives. It will be fair to open a parenthesis for Munis here because of her inclination to step out of her preordained role. Once intrigued by the book's front cover titled *Sexual Fulfillment or How to Know Our Bodies*, Munis ventures out to read this book, staying away from home for 3 days. Despite her brother, Amir Khan's exhortations that "women belong in the house. The outside is the world of men" (p. 26), she puts her life at stake. She is aware that her act will ruin the family's reputation and will have some consequences. However, the book she has read has given her a different aura to perceive things differently: "Alia dear," she said after a long pause, "I am not the old Munis anymore. I now know a lot more" (p. 30). Not because of her defenseless position but because of her epiphanic realization of the self-alienating social forces that occupy a woman's body, she gives no resistance to Amir Kahn when he murders her to protect his family's honor. However, later in the novella, she is resurrected like Lady Lazarus and endowed with a prophetic vision. Through magical realistic elements employed in the novella, Parsipur creates a fissure in the social frame into which the drops of higher consciousness are leaking to empower Iranian women. In this sense, Munis is exceptional among the female characters in the novella.

Initiating a schizoid phase through the death of her social body by setting herself free from the neurotic sufferings, Munis, as the resurrected one, has become an anti-Oedipus nomad, listless to the social, familial codes that have worried the old Munis. After Fa'iza and Munis as two virgins, have been raped on the road to Karadj by the lorry drivers, their different attitudes toward the loss of virginity may evidence Munis's anti-oedipal transformation:

*Fa'iza managed to bring her sobbing under control enough to cut into Munis's monologue. "Madam," she addressed Farrokhlaga, "but I was a virgin. At some point, I want to get married. How can I deal with the dishonor of losing my virginity? How can I live down the disgrace?"*

*"But, my dear girl," said Munis, "I was a virgin, too. To hell with it. So what if we are not virgins anymore? Who cares?" (p. 71)*

Fa'iza is not as strong as Munis. It will not be wrong if one claims that she is a typical example of Monique Wittig's characterization of the ideologically created female figure who is unconscious of the oppression exerted on her body and freedom in her influential essay on "One is not born as a Woman" (Wittig, 2013, p. 246). She mindlessly sticks to her role. She is obsessed with round faces and evaluates people through their facial contours. Parsipur states in the author's note to the novella that one of her cousins, who has a dysmorphic obsession and hates Parsipur because of her round face, has inspired her for the character of Fa'iza (Parsipur, 2011, p. 97). Her blind love for Amir Khan, Munis's brother, symbolically represents the blind adherence of women to their unconsciously held roles in the patriarchal system. Her love so blinds her that she even becomes Amir Khan's complicit in burying Munis's dead body, justifying his honor-killing act: "Man, listen to me," she addressed Amir Khan firmly. "This is an abomination. Why are you crying? You are a brother. You have honor, and a duty to protect it. You killed her? You did the right thing" (p. 32).

Thinking of herself as a prospective wife to Amir Khan, Fa'iza initially has no regrets about what they have done. However, once she hears that Khan will marry a much younger girl than she is, she feels frenzied. Despite realizing the vulnerability and gullibility in her character upon her confrontation with the resurrected Munis in her newly transformed body, she still cannot develop enough insight into to what extent she has been victimized in the system. Through Munis's comment about Fa'iza's character that "there is something unclean in your nature" (p. 39) Parsipur implies the pollutant effects of the poisonous codes imprinted on the Iranian women. To Parsipur, some Iranian women are like Fa'iza, unconscious of or indifferent to the pollution in their nature caused by the patriarchal system. Fa'iza's willingness to be a second wife to Amir Khan illustrates how most Iranian women are deeply immersed in the seemingly dogmatic roles/codes imposed on them by the patriarchy that cause pollution in their character.

Mrs. Farrokhlaga Sadroddin Golchehreh is another central character in the novella worth mentioning. Parsipur states that her mother and her cousin became a role model for her characterization (p. 95). She is a wealthy, beautiful widow who bought the villa with the mythic garden, which would be the meeting point for the female protagonists in the novella. Before she accidentally killed her husband, she was systematically exposed to her husband's verbal attacks and insulting jokes related to her menopausal period. With his self-justifiably expressed ideas on why polygamy is a necessity for men, insinuating her menopause, he says: "That is why polygamy is allowed for a man so he won't have to put up with a menopausal woman in his bed for the rest of his life" (p. 50). Farrokhlaga has lost her vitality and dynamism in her thirty-two-year marriage with a man she had never loved. She has found the death of her husband a blessing to de-territorialize herself, "to initiate new friendship and associations of her own choice, with artists, scholars, writers" (p. 62). She wishes to participate in political life and write good poetry.

Farrokhlaga has become a nomad like other female characters in the novella, desiring her long-suppressed energy to flow freely. Therefore, she thinks that her immediate move to the villa with the beautiful garden in Karadj is vital for her quest for self-becoming. While walking around the villa's garden with the real estate agent, she sees Mahdokht, the human-tree in the garden. Her amazement is not because of Mahdokht's rhizomic transformation but because of the madness behind her deed. It is evident in her dialogue with the real estate agent:

*Ostovary: This poor soul went mad and planted herself in the ground.*

*Farrokhlaga: But this is not going to work. She needs to be taken to the insane asylum. (p. 64)*

Instead of questioning the reasons that drove her to this tragic act, Farrokhlaga and Ostovary prefer to stigmatize her with madness. Farrokhlaga's lack of empathy towards Mahdokht may perhaps allude to some women's tendency to judge each other in the patriarchal Regime of Iran. The women's blind adherence and unconscious exposure to the social norms cause them not to identify with one another's cases, making them blind to the common problems that possibly drive them to neurotic or psychotic crises. Although Farrokhlaga cannot fully establish emphatic ties with Mahdokht, she intuitively feels something profound inside between them. Therefore, she finds Ostovary's comment hard to understand when he says that her becoming a tree has brought disgrace to the family, and because of that, she could buy the house at a lower price:

*"Why were they embarrassed by her?" asked Farrokhlaga, unwilling to leave the subject. "There is no shame in becoming a tree."*

*"What do you mean by that, madam?" Ostovary exclaimed with unaccustomed sharpness. "A sane person does not turn*

*into a tree. One must be insane like this poor soul for the transformation to take place. (p. 65)*

The human-tree in Farrokhlāqa's garden creates a kind of muddy water, that is, a paradoxical matrix thanks to the juxtaposition of magical and realistic elements—creating a sort of defamiliarizing effect on the unconsciously held ideas and roles. Discussing the issue of madness via the innocent aspect of the human-tree, Parsipur implicitly but ironically satirizes the normative evaluation and justification of women's social problems such as honor killing, rape, underage marriage, and the sinful nature of public space for women. It is worthwhile to add that Farrokhlāqa's sympathy towards the human-tree does not result from her feminist consciousness of women's social problems but from her ambitious interest to become a movement leader, using the unique presence of the human-tree:

*With a human-tree in her possession, Farrokhlāqa thought, ignoring Ostovary, she would not need any other kind of tree. The fact that she had come to own it, meant that she was superior to others in native intelligence, intellectual capacity, spiritual and physical fitness. Others did not deserve to possess a human-tree because they did not have the capacity to understand the significance of the "human-tree." Not that she herself fully understood the existential implications of owning a human-tree, but intuitively she knew that the tree would bring her fame and fortune. (p. 66)*

Although Farrokhlāqa is a wealthy widow with her powerful presence who tries to materialize her suppressed desires after killing her husband, she is another victim in the novella who suffers from neurotic worries about whether she can become a part of the existing social order. These worries fail her in her attempt to write poems, which she considers a prerequisite for participating in the intellectual-political community. With a similar concern to Nina Baym's stress on the lack of "a language of socially marked women have used in the past" (1997, p. 157) in her famous essay "The Madwoman and Her Languages," Parsipur may insinuate in Farrokhlāqa's case, that there is no presence of language of the socially accepted women to imitate in the male-dominated social and intellectual spheres in Iran. Because there is no ancestral trajectory for women to trace to find their voice in the public arena, Munis even feels powerless in this case to help Farrokhlāqa's failed attempt at writing poetry. Therefore, she guides Farrokhlāqa to relieve herself from this urge by alternatively suggesting that she become a model for a painter, which she thinks best suits her. Parsipur, with Munis's suggestion, creates an ironical stance that implicitly sheds light on the social position of women as inferior to men since it reduces women to a scopophilic object, which makes them a captive in the male gaze. Despite her chance to de-oedipalize herself from the yoke of the existing order after killing her husband, she opts for re-oedipalization, marrying an ambassador.

Parsipur makes the boldest step by including a character, Zarrinkolah, a prostitute at Golden Akram's brothel. She has never had a chance to have a life outside the brothel. For her characterization, Parsipur mentions that she is inspired by a beautiful prostitute whom she met in her surroundings close to a brothel in Tehran. She further states that she met this woman years later when the leaders of the Islamic Regime jailed her for the publication of this book (Parsipur, 2011, p. 96). As Azar Nafisi mentions, Parsipur's portrayal of a prostitute as a woman of dignity indicts the Islamic Regime (2022, p. 57). Parsipur's idea of prostitution is in parallel with Bernard Shaw's notion in his preface to *Mrs. Warren's Profession* that prostitution is a discourse created "not by female depravity" but by the social injustices caused by the governors (2000, p. 155). They both dignify prostitution despite their methodologically different approaches. Unlike the authoritarian presence of Mrs. Warren in Shaw's play, Parsipur empowers Zarrinkolah, endowing her with a pre-Oedipal vision, which is, in this context, the ability to see men without heads: "That's right," said Zarrinkolah, "now I'm telling you that I see all people without heads, I mean men, not women" (Parsipur, 2011, p. 56).

Zarrinkolah initially interprets it as a curse upon her, which, she thinks, requires "the devotional ablution" (p. 56). She bathes and prays to God all day to relieve her from this curse. However, it is the moment when she is unknowingly de-territorialized. This seeming curse brings her to a threshold where she struggles with her neurotic crisis. That is, it is a line of flight for her nomadic quest. Not knowing where to head for, she meets a kind gardener. Parsipur envisages him as an ideal male figure for Iranian men, grounding on the religious portrayal of man as not a cruel master but a kind butler. He would be the only male character present in the garden. Both end up in a Farrokhlāqa's mythical garden where Zarrinkolah gives birth to a flower, feeds Mahdokht the tree with her milk, and flies off to the sky with the kind gardener.

Amidst the silencing tools practiced by the patriarchal authority on the five female characters at different levels, the garden in Karadj functions as an intersecting point for them. In the author's note, Parsipur points out that she intentionally locates the garden in Karadj in the novella because of her romantic yearning for the beautiful gardens of this nice vacation resort, which, she doubts, turns into a frightening, bustling city (p. 98) Therefore, Parsipur portrays it as a mythical Persian garden. Bresheeth, in his article on the movie adaptation of the novella by Shirin Neshat, similarly features the significance of the garden as a sacred space in Babylonia tantamount to the Garden of Eden (2010, p. 756). In discussing the third principle of heterotopia, Foucault similarly illustrates the Persian garden as a sacred heterotopic space that includes the totality of the

world. This garden, long supposed to be a paradise on earth, has become a motif widely used in different cultures and religions (Foucault & Miskowicz, 1986, p. 25). It is a space where myth and real conjoin. Foucault compares it to an umbilicus, a threshold of convergence and divergence of the things (p. 25). In Parsipur's context, her incorporation of the magical elements into the realistic setting of the garden as an ordinary event is significant in understanding Parsipur's intention to create such a heterotopic zone beyond the binary categorization. Talattof, an essential researcher on gender issues in Iran, posits that Parsipur's practice of magical realism is necessary to voice out the issues inexpressible otherwise in the borders of the real (2000, p. 156). As the interstitial passage, the carnivalesque atmosphere of the garden enables the rhizomic celebration of the fluidity across and within species. Talattof similarly sees the garden as the point for the merging horizons for the women who once had a limited view of the outside from the windows in their houses (2004, p. 44). Assuming the first principle of rhizome, argued by Deleuze and Guattari that "any point of rhizome can be connected to anything other" (1988, p. 7), in the novella, Mahdokht-becoming-tree, Zarinkolah's giving birth to a flower, Zarrinkolah and the kind Gardener-becoming-stars may all be illustrated for Parsipur's celebration of the rhizomic multiplicity against the totalitarian Regime that imprison women in the rigid roles and spaces that suppress their creativity.

To conclude, Parsipur presents different layers of victimization through the carefully selected female characters. Fa'iza is the most blinded character who deeply immerses herself in the system and fears self-confrontation with her victimized position. Her consent to become Amir Khan's second wife may be evidence of this argument. Farrokhlaqa falls into the second category. She faces up to her victim profile by killing her husband, but she eventually succumbs to the mediocrity of the existing social order through her remarriage. Mahdokht and Zarrinkolah are aware of the social issues that suffer them, but they prefer to evade their victim profiles through their rhizomic transformation. Munis's victim profile is different from the categories mentioned above. Her position may tally with Atwood's creative non-victim position.

In Position Four, creative activity of all kinds becomes possible. Energy is no longer suppressed (as in Position One) [...] you can accept your own experience for what it is, rather than having to distort it to make it correspond with others' versions of it (particularly those of your oppressors). (Atwood, 2012, p. 38)

Munis's tendency to break codes and her prophetic vision shows her schizoid character to de-oedipalize herself. Toward the end of the novella, her nomadic quest into the abyss of darkness, as many mythic hero/heroines did, endows her with wisdom. This journey helps her unfold a third space where she has become the non-creative victim who can create a dynamic, decentralized, anti-oedipal self, transcending the established borders of the oppressive Regime.

### Conclusion

This article has posited that the garden in both works may function as a line of escape for these victimized women from the rigid lines of the cultural representations that stifle women's creativity and destroy their claims in the public arena. Locating the garden at the interstice between real and magic, both Parsipur and Burnett intentionally cause fluidity and vagueness in the characters and readers' settled perceptions to open up new horizons that would possibly help women to actualize their creative potentials, having long been stigmatized as heresy in the male-dominated public space.

Despite the social, cultural and historical contexts of their works, both Burnett and Parsipur imagine the garden as a liminal space for the anti-Oedipal women who want to dismantle the subjectivity on which the patriarchy has unconsciously imprinted some oppressive codes that put them under Oedipal yoke. In both works, Burnett and Parsipur try to shake off the fascistic authority of the oedipalization on the women by displacing them from the yoke of patriarchal authority into a magical, realistic garden—a negotiation space, which is, in essence, nomadic, rhizomic, and fluid. Thus, the garden in both works may serve as a privileged space for the women who struggle to move beyond their fixed identities amidst the neurotic worries they suffer in holding onto their societal roles. Portraying the garden as an interstitial space, both Burnett and Parsipur have attempted to awaken the women unconsciously trapped in the performative roles prefigured by the patriarchal order.

Unlike the traditional notion of gardens as entertaining spaces for pleasure-seeking men, with which women had passive association, both Burnett and Parsipur have allowed for a subversive exploration of the garden in their works and have aimed to create a dialogic space at the nexus of magic and real where women can navigate and negotiate new perspectives for life.

*Peer-review:* Externally peer-reviewed.

*Conflict of Interest:* The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

*Financial Disclosure:* The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

*Hakem Değerlendirmesi:* Dış bağımsız.

*Çıkar Çatışması:* Yazar, çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmiştir.

*Finansal Destek:* Yazar, bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

## References

- Atwood, M. (2012). *Survival: A thematic guide to Canadian literature*. House of Anansi.
- Baym, N. (1997). The Madwoman and her Languages: Why I do not do Feminist Literary Theory? In R. R. Warhol & D. P. Herndl (Eds.), *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (pp. 154–167). Rutgers University Press.
- Bresheeth, H. (2010). Shirin Neshat's *Women Without Men*. *Third Text*, 24(6), 754–758. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2010.517924>
- Burnett, F. H. (2004). *The Secret Garden*. Macmillan Collector's Library.
- Burton, R. (Ed.). (2001). *The Arabian Nights: Tales from One Thousand and One Nights*. Modern Library.
- Cixous, H. (1976). The Laugh of the Medusa. *Chicago Journals*, 1(2), 875–893.
- Darcy, J. (2009). The Edwardian Child in the Garden: Childhood in the Fiction of Frances Hodgson Burnett. In A. E. Gavin et al. (Ed.), *Childhood in Edwardian Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Deleuze, G., & Félix Guattari. (1988). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Vol. 2). Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Foucault, M., & Miskowicz, J. (1986). Of Other Spaces. *Diacritics*, 16(1), 22–27.
- Gymnich, M., & Lichterfeld Imke. (2012). The Secret Garden Revisited. In U. et al. Baumann (Ed.), *A Hundred Years of The Secret Garden* (pp. 7–14). V&R Unipress.
- Hardyment, C. (2014). *Pleasures of the Garden: A Literary Anthology*. British Library.
- Hetherington, K. (1997). *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering*. London.
- Jenkins, R. Y. (2011). Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*: Engendering Abjection's Sublime. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 36(4), 426–444. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.2011.0039>
- Keyser, E. L. (1983). 'Quite Contrary': Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*. *Children's Literature*, 11(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1353/chl.0.0636>
- King James Bible*. (1996) (Vol. Vol. 16.). Proquest LLC.
- Koppes, P. B. (1978). Tradition and the Individual Talent of Frances Hodgson Burnett: A Generic Analysis of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *A Little Princess*, and *The Secret Garden*. *Children's Literature*, 7(1), 191–207. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1353/chl.0.0131>
- Lichterfeld, I. (2012). 'There was every joy on earth in the secret garden' – Nature and Female Identity in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*. In U. et al. Baumann (Ed.), *A Hundred Years of The Secret Garden Frances Hodgson Burnett's Children's Classic Revisited* (pp. 27–37). V&R Unipress.
- Nafisi, A. (2022). *Read Dangerously: The Subversive Power of Literature in Troubled Times*. Dey Street Books.
- Parsipur, S. (2011). *Women Without Men*. (Faridoun Farrokh, Trans.). The Feminist Press.
- Parsipur, S. (2013). George Orwell and I. An Article. *Angilista*, 17(1), 49–51.
- Price, D. E. (2001). Cultivating Mary: The Victorian Secret Garden. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 26(1), 4–14. <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.0.1658>
- Raimund Borgmeier. (2012). The Garden in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* in the Context of Cultural History. In U. et al. Baumann (Ed.), *A Hundred Years of The Secret Garden: Frances Hodgson Burnett's Children's Classic Revisited* (pp. 15–26). V&R Unipress.
- Recchio, T. (2020). *The Novels of Francis Hodgson Burnett*. Anthem Press.
- Sadi. (2018). *The Gulistan*. (E. Rehatsek, Ed.). Global Grey.
- Seem, M. (1983). Introduction. In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Vol. 1, pp. xv–xxiv). University of Minnesota Press.
- Shaw, B. (2000). *Plays Unpleasant* (Vol. 10). Penguin.
- Soja, Edward, W. (1996). *Third Space: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Blackwell Publishers Inc.
- Stefanie Krüger. (2012). Life in the Domestic Realm – Male Identity in *The Secret Garden*. In U. et al. Baumann (Ed.), *A Hundred Years of the Secret Garden* (pp. 69–76). V&R Unipress.
- Talattof, K. (2000). *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature*. Syracuse University Press.
- Talattof, K. (2004). Breaking Taboos in Iranian Women's Literature. *World Literature Today*, 9(12), 43–46.
- The Glorious Qur'an*. (n.d.) (Bi-lingual Edition).
- Threadgold, R. (1979). The Secret Garden: an appreciation of Frances Hodgson Burnett as a novelist for children. *Children's Literature in Education*, 10(3), 113–119. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01146901>
- Thwaite, A. (1991). *Waiting For The Party: The Life of Francis Hodgson Burnett*. David R. Godine Inc.
- Vedder, H. C. (1894). *American Writers of To-Day*. Silver, Burdett and Company.
- Wittig, M. (2013). One is not Born a Woman. In C. McCann & S. K. Kim (Eds.), *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*. Routledge.