

The garden next door: the double theme of exile and identity



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[The [The [The The Garden Next Door: The Double Theme Of Exile And Identity This paper will discuss the double theme of exile and identity in the novel " The Garden Next Door" Julio's problem is related to the question of exile that is implicit in the title garden next door, the paradise always irrevocably lost. While exile here is presented as a specific, historical, and personal circumstance because Julio and Gloria are in exile because of the political situation in Chile, it is also a metaphor of life in general, the human condition: everyone lives expelled from the Garden of Eden that would accord the unchallenged possession of power and a position of visible centrality. The question then is how to position the self to ensure that one is seen framed or centralized, as one would choose On some level Julio would recreate that paradise, centralize and empower himself, with his novel: he would write a testimonial novel in which he would be both observer and observed, subject and object, and by doing so, incorporate himself into the " Boom," make himself visible both inside and outside his work of fiction, as the I/eye in it and as the celebrity outside it.

Thus, that garden, that paradise lost, must be read as a metaphor of power. Remember, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were pretty much in control of the world, and Adam, charged with naming all the flora and fauna, might be seen as both a demigod and as the original, human writer.

Nonetheless, that garden, from which we perceive ourselves as inevitably exiled, is always located elsewhere and possessed by someone else; thus even one's image of it is necessarily projection, fiction. For Julio, the garden of the duke's house next door, which he " sees" voyeuristically through the frame of the open window, is an ideal setting onto which he projects the fantasies that allow him to perceive the life of the " beautiful," powerful <https://assignbuster.com/the-garden-next-door-the-double-theme-of-exile-and-identity/>

people next door. In this respect it mirrors the window in Larco's painting after it has been altered to include the idealized portraits of Hilda and Marcos. Still, the fact that Monika Pinell de Bray, one of the "inhabitants" of the garden next door, commits suicide suggests that power may be only in the eyes of the beholder. Furthermore, that "real" garden next door evokes the remembered one left behind in Chile, at his mother's house, the one from when "el mundo era ednico porque no nos propona an la tirnica opcin de ser, tal vez, amados y clebres", that is, when one was not yet charged with producing reflections (and by implication, distortions) of multiple selves/masks and feigning the power and centrality one rarely believes one has. Thus, again Donoso focuses on the question of seeing and calls into doubt the possibility of seeing anything objectively, as other than a reflection of a reflection.

More important, the garden next door is sometimes viewed through and framed by two living room windows, between which there is a painting, an optical illusion of a window. The juxtaposition of these two "types" of window spotlights their potential interchangeability and leads us to wonder from exactly where it is that we are "seeing." To complicate matters even more, Julio sometimes observes the garden from the living room windows, sometimes from the dining room window, sometimes from the kitchen window, and sometimes from the bedroom window, depending on which part of the garden he would have framed, centralized, or where he would focus his gaze. At any rate, there can be little doubt that all the windows, which would theoretically afford a view of/to the external, objective reality, function here as a metaphor for the traditional, mimetic fiction that affords a glimpse of a reality outside itself. But that metaphoric window, like the one in Larco's <https://assignbuster.com/the-garden-next-door-the-double-theme-of-exile-and-identity/>

painting, is an optical illusion. It is not a window to some unmediated, objective, external reality. On the contrary it is mediated and framed by the artist; at times it is merely a mirror that displays the observer's projections.

Works Cited

Donoso, Jos. *El jardn de al lado*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1981. (*The Garden Next Door*. Trans. St. Hardie Martin. New York: Grove, 1992.)