

## BACK TO PARADISE: EXPERIENCES WITH FANALES AS A TOOL FOR APPROACHING THE RENEWAL SPACE<sup>1</sup>

DE VUELTA AL PARAÍSO: EXPERIENCIAS CON FANALES COMO HERRAMIENTA DE APROXIMACIÓN AL ESPACIO DE RENOVACIÓN

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### Abstract

This article aims to show the complex object of a fanal -a glass lantern where a sculpture of Baby Jesus surrounded by miniatures depicting nature dwells- as a three-dimensional representation of the *hortus conclusus*. The reflection and data provided, show this object as a garden to take care of and as a reminder of the search and mental pilgrimage to the renewal space.

**Keywords:** *Hortus Conclusus*; Baby Jesus; *fanal*; pilgrimage; paradise; garden.

### Resumen

Este artículo pretende mostrar el complejo objeto de un fanal -una cápsula de vidrio de cristal con una escultura del Niño Jesús dentro, rodeada de miniaturas que representan la naturaleza- como representación tridimensional del *hortus conclusus*. La reflexión y los datos aportados muestran este objeto como un jardín a cuidar y como recordatorio de la búsqueda y peregrinaje mental hacia el espacio de renovación.

**Palabras clave:** *hortus conclusus*; Niño Jesús; *fanal*; peregrinaje; paraíso; jardín.

## THE SPANISH AMERICAN FANAL. NEW APPROACHES FOR STUDYING IT

The following article aims to interpret the complex object of a glass lantern containing the wooden sculpture of Baby Jesus and surrounded by miniatures representing nature (a fanal) as a tri dimensional depiction of the *Hortus Conclusus*. The case study is that of Latin American nuns using a visual and literary vocabulary of gardening and suggesting the use of this artefact as a tool to get and remainder of the renewal space.

The object in front of us is called a *fanal*, for the Spanish word for lantern. It is composed of a wooden sculpture of a child enclosed in a transparent glass dome and surrounded by many miniatures that represent the fauna and flora of the naturalistic world. In this particular *fanal*, the wooden sculpture was carved in Quito, Ecuador in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Christians interpret the figurine as a representation of the Christ child, while art historians identify the



whole composition as a devotional object that was popular among Hispanic American families and nuns, living lives of enclosure, in convents<sup>2</sup>. In Figure 1 a *fanal* is introduced (fig. 1). The following article aims to interpret the complex object of a glass lantern containing the wooden sculpture of Baby Jesus and surrounded by miniatures representing nature (a *fanal*) as a tri dimensional depiction of the *Hortus Conclusus*. The case study is that of Latin American nuns using a visual and literary vocabulary of gardening and suggesting the use of this artefact as a tool to get and remainder of the renewal space.

**Fig. 1. Wooden sculpture of Baby Jesus in a *fanal*, Eighteenth Century (Universidad de los Andes Collection, Santiago, Chile)**



Among researchers and art historians, only the wooden sculptures of Infant Jesus met with a wider scholarly interest, mostly within the context of studies on the development of what it is called the School of Quito<sup>3</sup> and its dissemination throughout the continent and in different regions of the Spanish Empire. In this article, a possible interpretation of those sculptures is provided, incorporating the context of the elements that surround them and the form of the enclosing lanterns, considering this whole object as a complete composition. Consequently, conclusions relating to the devotional spiritual and physical space created by religious women and nuns for the development of their special relationship with Infant Jesus will be proposed. In order to do that, apart from the visual analysis of the *fanales*, written sources from the convents are examined, some of which are texts officially recommended for nuns to read, others often created by the women, who themselves lived in a type of enclosure. Additionally, a comparison of the *fanales* with other visual representations from the convents throughout Hispanic America will allow to widen the context within which those devotional

objects can be interpreted. The comparison is anchored on the premise of Rudolph Otto in his classic *The Idea of the Holy*, that art (visuality in general, is added here) encourages an experience of the numinous (Otto 1967). As Diane Apostolos-Cappadona suggests, “Through its natural action of capturing and freezing the meaning of a ritual or a religious experience, the visual arts promote a re-experiencing of the original encounter” (Apostolos-Cappadona 2014).

The mentioned sources and scholarly literature related with the topics of female devotion and pilgrimage studies resulted in an interpretation that the unique female devotion related to *fanales* can be understood as a form of spiritual pilgrimage to paradise. A path to be closer to the Marian idea as *Hortus conclusus*.

A close revision of the standard and more recent literature related with “pilgrimage studies” concludes that the paradigms and frameworks established within this field, are currently being questioned and discussed. Thus, the present paper wants to contribute to this revisionist tendency. First, following the theory of pilgrimage and some of its popular statements, it is proposed that the inside of a *fanal* with the enclosed figure of Christ child can be identified with the sacred renewal space. Particularly, the “landscape”, this image of nature in its perfect blossoming state is a mnemonic tool that allows its viewer the possibility of imagining or entering paradise (spiritually, virtually). Through the act of praying in front of such a devotional object as well as the continuous, constant action of adding elements, decorating and rearranging of the composition inside, the devotee was able to spiritually accompany the Infant Jesus in this ideal space, a little Garden of Eden. Therefore, this sacred space is perceived as a social construct on both the material and symbolic levels. Going beyond the binary opposition of sacred versus secular –in which “sacred” is pre-determined by religious norms– in this practice, “sacred” is defined and established through devotional individual rituals, the discourse and the relation with the material object. Another binary pair of concepts related with pilgrimage that is questioned in the context of the contact with the discussed devotional objects is the contradiction of everyday versus extraordinary experience. When the nuns introduced apparently secular objects into the “out-of-this-world” space of a *fanal*, liminality and the extraordinary are added to their everyday life. Finally, also through incorporating various forms of corporal penance in relation to the Christ Child, the nuns continuously met the required ideals of a pilgrimage.

## THE SACRED RENEWAL PLACE

For the purpose of this study, the enclosed space of a *fanal* is interpreted as a three-dimensional representation of the motif of *Hortus Conclusus*<sup>4</sup>. In the Christian Western tradition this motif is typically depicted in a two-dimensional form as a way of bringing the idea of paradise closer to the everyday life of the devotees. Many cultures create and re-create an image of this ideal place or time as part of their religious beliefs, legends and/or traditional stories. The Christian tradition describes the Garden of Eden, while Greek mythology recalls the Golden Age. As a result of those traditions, paradise is typically imagined in the form of a garden and becomes the special place in which humanity can find direct, almost physical, contact with the deity.

The inspiration for the image of the *Hortus Conclusus* - a Latin name, meaning literally, enclosed garden- comes from the interpretation of a fragment of the Song of Songs (4:12 in Vulgate Bible): “My sister, my bride, you are a locked garden – a locked garden and a sealed spring”. It is later mentioned again in the Letter to Romans and its common interpretation identifies Christ as new Adam while his mother is the new Garden of Eden, the uncorrupted,

pure and sinless paradise (Larson 2013, 304). The enclosed and pure character of the *Hortus Conclusus* is related to the virginity of Mary, who kept her womb untouched and impeccable even after giving birth to Christ.

As a cultural mnemonic tool, the figure of *Hortus Conclusus* allows for its creator to spiritually return to paradise, to humanity's origins. This mental pilgrimage can be accompanied or supported by prayer, reading of literature or elaboration of material objects – all of them, literally or symbolically, serve to further embellish, decorate and perfect the garden. Such a virtual pilgrimage to the Garden of Eden, represented visually in painting, in devotional texts or in the composition of a *fanal*, suggests a symbolic interpretation of the natural elements that appear in the garden. A number of written sources since the Middle Ages identifies various flowers with Christian virtues and this tradition is eagerly accepted in Hispanic America. In the work *The Symbolic Garden* (*El Jardín Simbólico*) written by fray Pedro de Padilla, 1593, the plants in the paradise garden all have their specific meaning: a rose means virginity, a lemon tree is purity; iris – poverty; fig tree – sweetness; grapevine – spiritual joy; pomegranate – bravery; palm tree – justice; olive tree – mercy; smilax – science, and hawthorn – submissiveness. In America, we find the same idea of representing virtues and ideals with flowers from the paradise garden; for instance, in the painting of *The Divine Spouse* (José de Ibarra, 1727, Mexico), where a beautiful and feminine figure of young Christ is depicted half-lying on a bed of flowers, waiting in the Divine Garden for the souls of his devotees. Various flowers, butterflies and birds that surround him on the canvas are attributed with virtues and pious activities: such as hope (*esperanza*), prayer (*oración*), contemplation (*contemplación*), love (*amor*), grace (*gracia*), purity (*pureza*), chastity (*castidad*), good intentions (*recta intención*), suffering (*padecer*), charity (*caridad*). Additionally, it is the lavishness, fertility and abundance of fauna and flora that defined paradise's character.

This visible *horror vacui*<sup>5</sup> of the composition of the garden is characteristic of both *fanales* and other similar devotional objects from a different region and epoch. In the Netherlands since the late Middle Ages small altars were produced for convent nuns. Those objects called *besloten hofjes* or “enclosed gardens” included small figures of Christ, Virgin Mary and saints, as well as a variety of objects such as stones, relics, pieces of *papier maché*, pilgrims' souvenirs, crystals, and silk flowers, among others. Many of those objects were hand-made by the nuns themselves. Used for both private devotion and community celebrations, the *hofjes* served both the veneration of the represented deity (usually Virgin Mary) and a direct call and encouragement for the devotee to live a virtuous life; as it can be seen in the Latin inscription on the little altar in Mechelen that reads: “You are the garden, perfectly sweet and full of virtues, untouchable and full of flowers and grace”.

The character of the *fanales* is very similar. They depict a sacred ideal place while at the same time they contain it. An abundance of objects, flowers, little animals, pieces of jewellery, coins, crosses, coloured stamps, porcelain toys and other decorations surrounding the central figure of Infant Jesus, are visible. The Christ child appears as a chubby, rosy-cheeked baby – an image of a healthy and happy toddler that the nuns protected and cared for. The attention and care were expressed with material gifts, offerings in the form of miniature objects. Their different styles and materials within the same compositions prove that they were added at different time and possibly by different people. This continual addition of pieces extends the moment of creation of a *fanal* over time and illustrates the intimate character of the practice of caretaking within the devotional and everyday activities of the religious women that used them (fig. 2 and fig. 3).

Fig. 2. Wooden sculpture of Baby Jesus in a *fanal*, Eighteenth Century (Universidad de los Andes Collection, Santiago, Chile)



Fig. 3. Wooden sculpture of Baby Jesus in a *fanal*, Eighteenth Century (Universidad de los Andes Collection, Santiago, Chile)



The offerings –often hand-made by the devotees themselves– activate the enclosed paradise of a *fanal*. They were added as gifts for the Christ child embodied in the figurine that inhabits the garden. Although, in *fanales*, Jesus is represented mostly as a baby in a half-lying-down position or sleeping, sometimes he can be identified with the devotional motif largely popular throughout the Hispanic world, that is dressed up as a pilgrim boy (*Niño Dios*

*Peregrino*) (fig 4). In those cases, Infant Jesus is a pilgrim guide that leads his devotees towards the enclosed Garden of Eden. A fragment of a Christmas carol devoted to Baby Jesus, written by a Discalced Carmelite nun from Navarra (Spain) in 1887, expresses this urge to follow him and endeavour a spiritual pilgrimage: *De peregrino / te hallas vestido / Niño querido / bello cual sol. / Pues peregrina / soy en el mundo, / hagamos juntos / la excursión.* (You have dressed up as a pilgrim, my lovely Child, beautiful as the Sun. As I am a pilgrim in this world, let us walk together)<sup>6</sup>. And indeed, through the patient execution of the offerings to the Christ child in a *fanal*, the religious women living an enclosed life could imagine the experience of a physical pilgrimage. The interiors of the lanterns are filled with decorations executed using very laborious techniques that are related typically with female housework, pieces such as bead flowers or hand sewn and embroidered objects. The gradual and arduous processes of these activities –sewing, embroidering and walking– in a similar way put the devotees’ motivation, sacrifice and patience to the test – step by step, bead by bead, and stitch by stitch.

Fig. 4. Wooden sculpture of Baby Jesus as pilgrim in a *fanal*, Eighteenth Century (Carmelites of Santiago, Chile)



## PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES

Besides the physical experience of manufacturing objects for the *fanal*, nuns would make both physical and spiritual penitence inspired by the contemplation of the *fanal*.

For the celebrations of Christmas Eve and especially for female devotees, the Catholic authorities would recommend a spiritual preparation that consisted in realizing a novena—that is nine days of prayers, worshiping, and exercises to prepare the body and soul for the birth of Christ. As early as the fifteenth century, manuals and guides for performing a novena communicated the need for preparing the devotee’s spirit for receiving the Infant. The novena was composed to be read nine days before the 25 of December, when Jesus’ birth was celebrated. Praying the novena was a way to prepare the crib, the crèche, and the soul. Various novenas from the circles of religious women and nuns of mid-nineteenth-century Chile confirm that they were a part of a strategy to prepare the female devotee for the great event.

For example, the title of one such novena published in 1822 reads: *Practice and manner of celebrating and preparing oneself for the Holiest birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ: addressed to religious women and devoted souls that desire to get ready with fervor for this most tender Mystery* (Anonymous 1822). The emphasis of the novena is put especially on the progress of the gestation and the growth of the baby in the Virgin's womb, encouraging the feelings of expectancy and anticipation. Through the recommended prayers and preparation, the devotee experiences a mystical pregnancy in parallel to the Virgin Mary's. Novenas would typically relate each of the days of preparation and meditation on the mystery of Nativity with specific events or motifs from the life of expecting Virgin, for instance, as noted in one novena composed in Chile during the nineteenth century and published in 1902: "On the first day, one prays with nine Ave Maria in memory of the nine months that Jesus Christ was in the womb of Mary" (García 1902).

From the pregnancy period to the very moment of his arrival, the Infant Jesus is celebrated in an atmosphere of joy but also of humility—a virtue highly appreciated and recommended for early modern women, in Europe and the Americas. Taking the example of humility modeled by the incarnated divinity, the nuns would follow it as one of the main vows that facilitated proximity to God. Using vocabulary relating to the real-life experience, another Chilean novena from the beginnings of the nineteenth century describes the action of the first day in which the devotee should prepare the Christ child's crib and a little bed with her virtue of humility:

*And today, this first day, in the light of your Eternity, we prepare by cradle and bed, the Virtue of humility, which we should all have, when we see you descend from your supreme mountain of Eternity to the deepest valley of the human world* (Alcázar 1839, 6).

The physical experience of suffering and offering this pain to Baby Jesus is also narrated in the following experience: young nun went to visit an older one at the nursery, where the latter was very ill and decided not to have any treatment no medicine. The young nun commented:

*Virtues like these could not be executed with such strength and alone with a religious woman. I asked who this boy was that she had in her arms, the religious woman answered, nothing, there is no one here. But she insisted asking, how she could say that, when she held him in her hands and again the religious woman said that there was nothing. I kept such silence that it was clear it was the boy who answered her and it became known that he was Jesus Christ, as she was used to calling him, and in sweet caresses he stayed a long time after which the religious woman was asked if it was true that she had held some boy and when she saw that she was compromised and could not lie and her humility didn't allow her to pronounce the favors that she received from heaven, she didn't answer and she spoke of something else and it became clear that she didn't want to communicate to anyone what happened between her and the Lord, rather she wanted it to be a closed orchard and sealed vessel for her divine husband in which only He came to cut the flowers that she cultivated for him with such care<sup>7</sup>.*

## **SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE TO THE GARDEN OF EDEN. THE FANAL AS A NEMONIC RELIGIOUS ARTEFACT**

Several specific characteristics of *fanales* allow to see in them a pilgrimage-related spiritual renewal space (similar to *Hortus Conclusus*). The four outstanding aspects of the *fanal* are: a) the enclosure; b) design; c) miniaturization; d) care (here related with the activities of gardening).

## a) The enclosure

The enclosure or separation from the external world can be understood as a cultural strategy to control individual or shared desires within an enclosed space in pursuit of order. Closed gardens are the archetypal example of such a space where once nature is domesticated and controlled, construction of paradise can begin. It is not without coincidence that the word paradise originates from the Persian *paradaiza* meaning a wall-surrounded garden protected from the hot desert wind. The enclosed garden protects<sup>8</sup> and provides a tranquil space of intimacy and meditation. In that sense, convents and *fanals*, are spaces of protection that on the one hand keep external danger and sin away, while on the other hand sacralise everything that is contained inside.

In the fanal, it is the glass case which provides enclosure. This confinement shows the separation of a natural from a cultural one. When encapsulating nature –in this case a handmade simulation of an organic world–, the symbolic function of this world is declared. The subject thinks that they can get into this place to feel safe, and even redeemed in this protected garden. Inside this site, which is imagined and then created, the user feels protected from the dangers outside. The garden needs to be fenced and controlled, but its borders happen to be porous in order to allow the introduction of new species.

The glass of the *fanal* is a material which allows both vision and isolation (fig. 5). When isolating, what is inside gets frozen and is an abstraction of an interior world. Nevertheless, the possibility of intervening in the artefact by removing the glass case, permits a constant dynamism, which is also a characteristic of an interior world open to nourishment and fertilizing.

The glass allows the communication of the interior and the exterior, while at the same time it establishes a fissure which is both material and invisible. [Mircea Eliade \(1998\)](#) would talk about a sacralization of nature, while [Baudrillard \(1968\)](#) would talk about a naturalization of the sacred. Both statements shed light on the porosity of the boundaries and the arbitrariness of definitions.



Fig. 5. Wooden sculpture of Baby Jesus in a *fanal*, Eighteenth Century (Universidad de los Andes Collection, Santiago, Chile)



## b) Design

The aspect of design of the *fanales*, the selection of specific objects-miniatures, their placement and building of a composition in the interior of the glass dome, are related with the creation of meaning.

The religious man imitates the gods' exemplary gestures and, like them, emulates the act of creation through designing and creating a sacred space: the creation of nature.

In the medieval monastic communities, the garden design was meant to construct an austere Edenic appearance. Islamic influences would add the concept of pleasure garden. With time some flowers –the lily and the rose specially- began to be symbols of Marian virtues and appeared in any type of representation. “Mary had not simply infiltrated garden design; she had commandeered the contents of gardens as well” (Larson 2013, 307).

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century *fanales*, flowers and fruits –usually represented in their richest and most lush, blossoming state–, are the predominant elements present in those compositions. They allude to the cyclical character of nature that never dies. Because of their beauty and significance in different cultures, visual and literary arts have traditionally chosen flowers as a vehicle for expression.

There is a millenary tradition which binds the natural world and sacredness, a context that explains some features that flowers allude to, such as purity, virginity, beauty and ingenuity, virtues that traditional societies want to inculcate in women.

In Western painting tradition, individual flowers were used as symbols of specific feminine virtues. In Spanish America, these flowers and fruits proliferated, especially in the form of wreaths surrounding the Virgin with the Child.

Inside the *fanal* both flowers and fruits in miniature share the space, strengthening the idea of a cyclical nature which never dies. After the flower, comes the fruit and so on, developing a cycle which defies death. This dialectical process is seen in this cycle as in many others: that of night following day, some seasons giving way to the next season, death originating life. It is a concept of historicity in which constancy reigns. Flowers and fruits are always depicted in their best time, turgid and fresh. Having nature giving the best of itself, the spectator realizes that they need to give the best of themselves. When looking at the depiction of gorgeous flowers and fruits, traditional societies such as Colonial Hispanic American recognized the possibility of constant renovation.

It can be thought that emulating god's gesture, the making of a *fanal* could have been interpreted as the recreation of a special creation: God's choice of Mary as an *Hortus conclusus*, giving home to Christ in her interior. The oval shape of the lanterns that the nuns used, may be interpreted as a uterus where Christ the child inhabits a fertile, shiny and rich garden. The *fanal* as a tri dimensional representation of the *Hortus Conclusus* came to be seen as an emblematic artefact depicting Mary's purity. By interacting with the lanterns, nuns create and recreate their own Marian ideal and vow of purity.

Making an enclosed and paradisiacal garden in miniature is an activity found in many cultures. A Chinese tradition is presented by Mircea Eliade, who describes the creation of little gardens in containers with small rocks and trees, as well as miniatures of houses, flowers, bridges and human figures. Eliade reads these artefacts as a small world that was installed in people's homes to reset, by meditation, world harmony. They represent a heavenly world, an ideal and secluded space (Eliade 1998, 113). What is unique to the *fanal* is that Christ dwells inside.

### c) Miniaturization

Miniaturization is a ritual. When the world, its objects or its languages are miniaturized as a phenomenological exercise, the world is recreated: "The better I am at miniaturizing, the more I possess the world" (Bachelard, 1975, 186).

In the miniature, values are condensed and enriched.

In relation to language, this practice is clear in those "little verses" to Baby Jesus. In Spanish, when you add *-ita* or *-ito* to a word, you make the object cute and tiny. The nuns depict themselves as *pastorcitas* (little shepherds), *esclavitas* (little slaves), and *guasitas* (little country people) and they bring presents to *el cogollito* (little heart) or Manuelito who lies on a bed of *pajitas* (little straws). The nuns cultivate "little pears, little oranges and little watermelons." This miniaturized vocabulary is taken from the countryside or from the orchards. The offerings are also miniaturized and when leaving their functional size, they are taken away from everyday life and become sacred. As Bachelard argues, the miniature is home to greatness (Bachelard, 1975, 192).

Nuns from convents in Santiago de Chile were famous for their handmade miniatures, especially those made by the Clara nuns. They made a special type of handicraft called perfumed ceramic, which consisted of little clay figures that smelled of perfume. Some of those manufactured were used as gifts for important people from Chilean society, such as Federico Errázuriz Echaurren, the president of Chile, who in 1906 visited the convent accompanied by his mother, his wife and his daughter (Bichon, 1946: 22). This anecdote shows how important these miniature figures were to the nuns. So much so, they were given to the President and to God.

## d) Gardening

It is not just the form of the fanal and its similarities –from tri dimensionality– with the Hortus Conclusus which bring to mind the womb of Mary. Some other features, such as the ritual treatment around it and the literature referring to gardening, shed light on the importance of considering more than just visuality when interpreting this artefact. Following the general ideas presented in Robert Maniura and Rupert Sheperd’s book, visual likeness is not the only way to recognize presence in an image (Maniura and Sheperd, 2006), as David Freedberg (2009) argues in his work *El poder de las Imágenes. The power of Images*. The way the users care for the *fanal* makes clear the authenticity of the experience with this artefact.

When connecting natural life depicted inside the *fanal* and spiritual life experienced by the nuns, what is revealed is the main goal of a garden: life. The sacred and the profane are mediated through the garden, which is an internalization of nature in an allegoric vocabulary.

The relationship between the object and the subject can be understood under a theory of transference, where the object is immersed in a broader context of behavioral patterns between subjects and objects as well as subjects with other subjects (Lynch 2009, 44). These behaviors include those referring to the act of caring: nuns taking care of one another, sick people, orphans, children in their care, liturgical objects, and their gardens. In the case of nuns taking care of each other, the eldest take care of the youngest, sometimes developing a mother-daughter relationship, tending to their physical and spiritual health together.

For Colonial Cuzco, Kathryn Burns has looked at Santa Catalina and Santa Clara convents, concluding that by caring for those children and adolescents who entered the convent, nuns had the possibility of redefining in their own way institutions such as marriage and family (Burns 1999, 114).

Just as the garden requires special care to be alive, removed from plagues and other dangers, the garden of the soul also needs its care. In nature, trees and flowers grow and have their cycles; they need a certain amount of water and fertilizer. In this sense, a garden is never fully finished, but needs constant care, unless we let it grow wild or, in the worst situation, we let it die. A desire to care for the garden accompanies its creation. Something similar occurs with the garden of the soul: the more we take care of it, the more we participate in God’s creation.

Verses compound by a Dominican Chilean nun in the last decades of the 18th century refers to the cares of the soul as if it was a garden:

### THE GARDENER

*When a plant dies,  
watering her is in vain.  
Tell me, who is to blame,  
the plant or the gardener?  
Because he did not take care of her,  
when he wanted to water her,  
it was too late.  
Tend to the plant that is your soul,  
don't let it slip away.  
Look what God has given you  
and you are the gardener.  
She has been gifted to you pure,  
to such a lofty end.*

*Watering her frequently  
will make you a famous gardener.  
The work is very light  
because the Beloved is so sweet  
that He helps us take care  
of the plant He has given us.  
For such easy work,  
God rewards  
the plant and the gardener  
with the kingdom of heaven.<sup>9</sup>*

Besides the above, according to [David Chidester \(2018\)](#), the sacred space –in this case a garden in the *fanal* where Jesus the child dwells-, is directional. This means that this sacred space draws the spectator's attention also stirring his soul. As a synecdoche of the Garden of Eden, a garden offers the possibility of redemption from sins. Because of its cyclical nature, the garden regenerates itself.

The presence of orchards inside the convents as well as those works of gardening comes from a long term relationship with nature. From the Middle Ages, convents had arable lands to provide subsistence and to develop a Christian vision towards nature. It was mentioned in the Genesis: *The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it* (Genesis 2:15).

Based on traditional ideas taken from the Fathers of the Church medieval monks settled the bases of the work in the orchard. According to Origenes, humanity transforms nature because it does not have their basic needs met.

There are other religious sources that nourish the importance of working the land as a way for man to actively participate in God's work. Saint Thomas, for example saw the embellishment and cultivation of nature as a path to get away from sin. Saint Bernardo states that nature is there for man to work in its fruitfulness and to help them to move away from wild nature ([Glacken, 1996, 293](#)). Saint Augustine argues that monks should work with their hands in a literal way ([Glacken, 1996, 294](#)).

The aspect of taking care of the garden (gardening) can be perceived within the context of the interpretation of the Song of Songs in which the soul of a devotee is the enclosed garden that requires care in order to remain alive and safe from plagues, weeds and destruction. In the same way that a garden requires constant attention, control of the plant growth and cycles and water and fertilisers, the soul cannot thrive without similar care. Additionally, the idea of taking care of a garden implies the possibility of regeneration – even if the garden was neglected for some time, it can come back to life if taken care of again. In that sense, the metaphor of the soul as a garden –and particularly, Garden of Eden– results in the possibility of relief from the weight of sin. A pilgrimage and penance are tools for this spiritual gardening, that is taking care of the soul. For instance, this prayer was written by a Carmelite nun around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She uses the mnemonic technique to remind herself of a serie of corporal penances as an offering to Infant Jesus. These sacrifices include carrying out other nun's chores, wasting no time, avoiding pleasures and not eating chocolate and sweets.

We find this parallel of the paradise garden and the soul of a good devotee in a song composed for the founder of the convent of Dominican nuns in Santiago de Chile:

*From the Religious Garden*

*that lovely flower was not uprooted by a thief,  
your Divine Spouse  
took her for himself: and therefore she,  
surrendering to such kindness,  
resolutely gives him her Spirit.  
Sor Maria Antonia lives...<sup>10</sup>*

The gardening metaphor and vocabulary continue throughout the lyrics:

*It matters not if the  
Peregrine Rose is trampled  
in this garden  
containing so many Roses.  
The Almighty  
has cultivated the seeds  
since the day Maria Antonia  
sowed them.  
From Heaven  
she fertilizes the earth,  
and to have made it more fertile,  
she left it her ashes<sup>11</sup>*

Finally, also in Santiago, in the library of the Dominican nuns we find a book titled *Spiritual Meditations (Meditaciones Espirituales, 1690)* whose author father Luis de la Puente describes Virgin Mary as the model of devotion for the nuns, once again using the garden metaphor:

*You're a locked garden and a sealed spring. Call her a locked garden twice because she was perfectly chaste in both soul and in body, confirming it with a perpetual vow, which served as a lock for her safekeeping and was guarded by the virtues of humility, modesty, silence and abstinence. For this reason, I also refer to these virtues as the orchard, in order to make clear that her virginity was not sterile, but was rather accompanied by many flowers of virtue and the good fruits of her works, some of which beautified the soul, others decorated the body...*

*Oh, how pleasant this orchard was to the Divine Spouse, who renewed himself with the sight and smell of her flowers of virtue; ate of the sweet fruits of her good works...<sup>12</sup>*

As it is appreciated throughout this article one does not need to visit a holy place to experience the renewal offered by the sacred space. Even in their everyday chores, colonial Hispanic American nuns could find the extraordinary. They had the opportunity to create their own virtual pilgrimage towards paradise without having to physically visit the “officially sacred” places. With the creation of such an artefact as the *fanal*, they created meaning, encouraging the experience of the numinous.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The *fanal* is an artifact composed of several elements: a wooden sculpture of Baby Jesus surrounded by miniatures depicting flora and fauna and encapsulated by a crystal dome. While art history pays more attention to the wooden sculptures of the Baby Jesus and their clothing exclusively, this article has considered the *fanal* as a whole.

Diverse and complementary methodologies have been used to interpret this artifact. These include the iconographic studies and the so called Material Culture Studies. The first methodological approach sheds light on its different levels: from the literal, its visuality, to the cultural, an interpretation of the *fanal* as an *hortus conclusus* as revealed by poems, biblical references, and both primary- and secondary-source bibliographies.

From the approach of Material Culture Studies, we have departed from some objects with the goal of gaining information about the subjects who interacted with them. This article is not concerned with the production, circulation, or commercialization of the object, but rather with the South American nuns' interactions with the objects within convent walls.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> This article is based on the contributions of Pilgrimage Studies as well as those from Material and Material Religion Culture. In Material Culture Studies, scholars use an object as the point of departure to hypothesize the meaning and uses subjects may have given to it in a specific religious culture. In this article, this culture consists of the nuns inhabiting Hispanic American convents during the 18th and 19th centuries. In Material Religion Studies, the understanding of religion includes a system of ideas, beliefs and relations which manifest through their materialization. If this materialization does not occur, religion is not possible. The religious belief is anchored and sustained by the material practice and, as David Morgan argues in his book *Religion and Material Culture*, beliefs are a corporeal assumption, a cognitive predisposition of an incarnated epistemology. In other words, to believe is to know with the body.

<sup>3</sup> The Quito School of sculpture was an artistic tradition or style created in polychromed wood. It was popular in the Real Audiencia de Quito, mainly during the eighteenth century and it is seen as the indigenous appropriation of Spanish style, especially that of Francisco Salzillo, along with Flemish and Italian influences. <sup>3</sup> The style was characterized by the imminence of movement, naïve expression of the depicted characters, and the use of the encarnado technique as a strategy of showing the flesh color with naturalism. Most Quito School sculptures had glass eyes, which also helped achieving the verism of the figure. The industrialized character of the production in Ecuador at the end of the century resulted in the spreading of the Quito School objects in the whole territory of the Viceroyalty of Peru and other regions of the Spanish Empire.

<sup>4</sup> *Hortus Conclusus* is used both as an emblematic attribute and a title of the Virgin Mary as well as a genre of actual garden.

<sup>5</sup> The expression *horror vacui* or horror to empty spaces is used in visual studies to refer to some of the characteristic of the baroque style in painting, architecture and design. It means filling of the entire surface of a space or an artwork, with details.

<sup>6</sup> Fragment from Villancico Al peregrino de la Ronda de villancicos de la fiesta del Dulce Nombre de Jesús de las Carmelitas Descalzas de Araceli de Corella, Navarra [Carol to the pilgrim of the Round of carols of the feast of the Sweet Name of Jesus of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns of Araceli de Corella] written by Madre María Teresa de la Sagrada Familia in 1887.

<sup>7</sup> "Semejante virtudes no podian ser ejecutadas con tanta firmeza i solo con una relijiosa le pregunté quien era ese niño que tenia en sus brazos, la relijiosa nada veia i le contesto que no habia nadie, pero ella insistia diciendole que como no cuando lo tenia tomado en las manos i dicho nuevamente por la relijiosa que nada habia, guardo profundo silencio. Fue sin duda que el niño le contestó i se dio a conocer era su Jesucristo como ella acostumbraba a llamarlo i quedandose en dulces caricias permanecio mucho rato al cabo del cual le preguntó la relijiosa si era cierto que habia

tenido algun niño i viendose ella en este compromiso que no podia mentir i no permitia su humildad decir los favores que recibia del cielo, no le contesto i le hablo otra cosa por lo que cayó en cuenta no queria comunicar a nadie lo que pasaba con su Dios, queriendo ser huerto cerrado i fuente cellada para su divino esposo en que El solo viniera a cortar las flores que con tanto cuidado le cultivava.” Miscellaneous documents, British Library, EAP821/1/1/76, <https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP821-1-1-76>

<sup>8</sup> The terrariums are a type of enclosed garden specially created to protect plants. The origin of this artefact, from 1829, is related to Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward’s desire to have a garden and the obstacles London’s pollution presented. He constructed crystal cases to protect his ferns and mosses from environmental pollution. Besides conducting experiments and designing these boxes, he wrote the book *On the growth of plants* in closely glazed cases, where he describes those conditions which do not allow plants to grow in big cities: lack of light and adequate humidity as well as the presence of harmful gases. These cases are interpreted to be an ideological device which reveals tensions in Victorian society which spanned from an exacerbated progress and urbanization, on the one side, to an endangered nature, on the other.

### *EL HORTELANO*

*Cuando una planta se seca  
para ella el riego es en vano  
dime quien tendrá la culpa  
la planta o el hortelano  
porque de ella no cuidó  
cuando la quiso regar  
el riego ya no sirvió.  
Cuida la planta de tu alma  
no la dejes de la mano  
mira que Dios te la ha dado  
y tú eres el hortelano.  
Dios te la ha entregado limpia  
con un fin tan soberano  
riégala frecuentemente  
serás famoso hortelano.  
El trabajo es mui ligero  
porque es tan suave el amado  
que él nos ayuda a cuidar  
la planta que nos ha dado.  
El premio que Dios les da  
por trabajo tan liviano  
es la posesión del Cielo  
a la planta y hortelano.*

<sup>9</sup> Verses written by sister Manuela del Carmen in Book of Mother Luisa de Jesús María Josefa G. Huidobro, British Library, EAP821/1/1/7, <https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP821-1-1-7>, p.74

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*Del jardin Religioso  
no la arrancó el ladrón a esa flor bella,  
vuestro Divino Esposo  
la llevo para sí: y entonces ella  
rendida a tal fineza  
su Espíritu le entrega con firmeza.  
su Espíritu le entrega con firmeza.  
Sor Maria Antonia vive)*



*No importa que atropelle  
A la Rosa Peregrina,  
de donde tantas Rosas,  
este Jardín matizan.  
El todo Poderoso  
es el que las cultiva,  
desde que María Antonia  
dispuso las semillas.  
Ella desde los Cielos  
la tierra fertiliza,  
y por más fecundarla  
la dejó sus cenizas.*

<sup>12</sup> “Huerto cerrado eres y fuente sellada. Llámala dos veces huerto cerrado porque tuvo perfecta castidad en el alma y en el cuerpo, confirmándola con voto perpetuo, el cual servía de cerradura para su mayor seguridad, añadiéndole por guardas la humildad, modestia, silencio y abstinencia, por razón de las cuales también las llama huerto, para que se entienda que su virginidad no era estéril sino acompañada con muchas flores de virtudes y con excelentes frutos de buenas obras, unas que hermoseaban el alma, otras que adornaban el cuerpo...Oh cuán agradable era este huerto al divino esposo. Recreábase con la vista y el olor de las flores de sus virtudes; comía de los dulces frutos de sus buenas obras.”