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Brigham Young University - Provo

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More than “Wisteria and Sunshine”: The Garden as a Space of Female Introspection and  
Identity in Elizabeth von Arnim’s *The Enchanted April* and *Vera*

Katie Elizabeth Young

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

C. Jay Fox, Chair  
Jamie Horrocks  
Leslee Thorne-Murphy

Department of English  
Brigham Young University

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## ABSTRACT

More than “Wisteria and Sunshine”: The Garden as a Space of Female Introspection and Identity in Elizabeth von Arnim’s *The Enchanted April* and *Vera*

Katie Elizabeth Young  
Department of English, BYU  
Master of Arts

Recent scholarly interest in Elizabeth von Arnim has related *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer* to the New Woman and Female Aesthete movements, concluding that von Arnim does not align herself with any movement per se. Rather, in these early works, Elizabeth advocates and adamantly defends her right to time in her garden, which becomes her sanctuary for reading and thinking. Little critical attention has been paid to von Arnim’s later works; however, many of the themes established in von Arnim’s early works can be traced through her later novels. In *The Enchanted April* Lady Caroline retreats to the garden at San Salvatore in order to escape the attention of others and discover who she really is and what she wants out of life. Because she follows the early von Arnim model by defending her garden sanctuary, she is able to find the strength to insist on being treated as a person rather than a beautiful object. Additionally, Lucy Enstwhistle’s interrupted time in the garden in *Vera* demonstrates the importance of the role of von Arnim’s garden in forming an identity and developing the ability to make decisions for oneself. Because Lucy allows Everard Wemyss to rob her of these opportunities, she loses the opportunity to create her identity. She soon becomes the second Mrs. Wemyss, realizes that she is abject, and begins taking on first wife Vera’s attributes and passions to cope with Everard’s constant demands. Because Lucy has forfeited the formative experiences the garden space can provide, Lucy is left to take up Vera’s identity and tragic fate.

Keywords: Elizabeth von Arnim, *Vera*, *The Enchanted April*, garden, women authors, twentieth-century fiction, abjectification, novelists, English

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“No good could come out of the thinking of a beautiful young woman. Complications could come out of it in profusion, but no good.” (von Arnim, *The Enchanted April* 90)

### Introduction

By the 1920s, Elizabeth von Arnim had abandoned her German garden and the memoirsque genre deemed “the garden romance” that had made her famous with works like the 1898 *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and the 1901 *The Solitary Summer* (Hapgood 92). However, von Arnim did not entirely abandon her literary career or the garden as a space of female introspection and restoration. The role of the garden in Elizabeth von Arnim’s *Vera* (1921) and *The Enchanted April* (1922) is vital to understanding the development of the characters, Lucy Enstwhistle (*Vera*) and Lady Caroline Dester (*The Enchanted April*). The beautiful Lady Caroline Dester retreats to the garden of San Salvatore in search of an identity outside of her beauty. As she spends time in this garden, her inner monologue and her interactions with other characters detail the process of claiming a personal identity as manifested by her “Scrap” persona and her ability to begin a relationship with Mr. Briggs on equal footing. This demonstrates how the process of introspection in the garden is supposed to work and what it is supposed to do for a character: The garden provides a space in which a character can discover the essence of her being, heal from past wounds and actively move towards a better future. However, in order for the garden to be effective, the character must spend time in the garden thinking through the various issues that plague her. In contrast to Lady Caroline, Lucy Enstwhistle’s interrupted time in the garden in *Vera* demonstrates the importance of the role of von Arnim’s garden in forming an identity and developing the ability to make decisions for oneself. Because Lucy allows Everard Wemyss to rob her of these opportunities, she loses the opportunity to create her identity. She soon becomes the second Mrs. Wemyss, realizes that she

is abject, and begins taking on first wife Vera's attributes and passions to cope with Everard's constant demands (Vera seems to be the only one who can sympathize with Lucy). Because Lucy is denied the formative experiences the garden space can provide, Lucy is left to take up Vera's identity and tragic fate. In these early 1920s novels, the garden provides a space of agency that allows a woman to create a life for herself if she chooses to complete the process of introspection in the garden. Lady Caroline Dester chooses to do so while Lucy Enstwhistle chooses not to, which leads to dire consequences.

There has been increasing scholarly interest in von Arnim of late, especially relating her early works to the New Woman and Female Aesthete movements of the Fin de Siècle, often seeing her feminism as occupying a middle ground between hunger strikers and homemakers.<sup>1</sup> This continues to inform von Arnim's approach to similar issues in *Vera* and *The Enchanted April*. Other scholars—particularly Sarah Bilston and Lynne Hapgood—point to the garden as a restorative space in *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer* because Elizabeth often uses her garden to withdraw from her household duties and reflect on her life and the behavioral expectations of being a German noblewoman.<sup>2</sup> Another such scholar is Wendy Gan, who claims, “in [. . .] *Elizabeth and her German Garden* there are scenes celebratory of nature and an awareness of nature's power to heal the stresses and strains of life that comes in a private encounter with the natural world” (16). This claim is manifested throughout von Arnim's work; however, this “awareness of nature's power to heal” (16) is not directly recognized in most of the novels, especially not *Vera* and *The Enchanted April*. I will add to the discussion of the function of the garden beyond *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer* in von Arnim's work by examining the process of confronting the “stresses and strains of life” in *The Enchanted April* and the consequences of interrupting this process in *Vera* (16).

Scrapping Lady Caroline: *The Enchanted April*'s Garden of Identity and Interiority

*The Enchanted April* is the story of four women who retreat from their dreary London lives to an Italian villa, where each finds both happiness and love. Over the course of the novel, the women decide to change their lives—Mrs. Wilkins decides not to be so scared, Mrs. Arbuthnot decides not to be so morally severe, and Mrs. Fisher decides not to be so entrenched in the past—and these changes improve the quality of their lives and their relationships with their husbands and friends. For Lady Caroline Dester, the process of change is longer, more involved, and more isolated. She approaches San Salvatore with a “dream of thirty restful, silent days, lying unmolested in the sun, getting her feathers smooth again, not being spoken to, not waited on, not grabbed at and monopolized, but just recovering from the fatigue, the deep and melancholy fatigue, of the too much” (64). Thus, where the other women face unpleasant consequences of the events of their lives, Lady Caroline confronts “the deep and melancholy fatigue of the too much” (64). She chooses the garden as the scene of her “thirty restful, silent days” (64), which quickly become days of introspection and change in an effort to seek “a conclusion” (109) that will allow her to return to her life post-San Salvatore. The differences in these changes reflect the problems each faces before arriving at San Salvatore.

The severity of the problems these women face varies. Mrs. Wilkins feels oppressed as she constantly fails to please her husband. Mrs. Arbuthnot is estranged from her husband because she finds his career immoral. Mrs. Fisher interacts with the great men of the past instead of people in the present. Lady Caroline feels just as ostracized as these women. She has spent her life being “grabbed” and consequently seems to have no connections despite being constantly surrounded by society. Additionally, she feels the weight of her beauty, which precludes the follies and harsher aspects of her character from being appreciated by the people idolizing her



beauty. Hence, where the three older women discover the need to work through what their lives have become because of their actions, Lady Caroline intentionally comes to San Salvatore to discover who she is beyond her beauty.

For a von Arnim heroine, this requires deliberate introspection in an isolated garden space. Lady Caroline participates in a typical von Arnim trope described by Talia Schaffer: “Relationships with men are often portrayed as fleeting and delicate, or disintegrating into animosity. [. . .] Women find safety by themselves,” by retreating “to the garden” (72). Hence, in *The Enchanted April*, when Lady Caroline begins “longing to get away from everybody she had ever known” (32), she goes to San Salvatore and claims the garden as her particular space to think. As von Arnim’s narrator presents Lady Caroline’s moments of interiority, she demonstrates the function of von Arnim’s garden as a space of prolonged, identity-forming introspection that allows this young, wounded, oppressed woman to face who she is and make decisions about what she wants. The garden process is crucial to Lady Caroline’s attempts to do this, and her success is demonstrated throughout the novel with the process culminating with her final interactions with Mr. Briggs.

Lady Caroline comes to San Salvatore to escape the common human propensity to fawn over beautiful objects such as young women. The first description of her beauty comes not when she is first introduced, but when Mrs. Arbuthnot and Mrs. Wilkins discover her in the garden. According to *The Enchanted April*’s narrator:

She was exceedingly pretty. Everything about her was very much that which it was. Her fair hair was very fair, her lovely grey eyes were very lovely and grey, her dark eyelashes were very dark, her white skin was very white, her red mouth was very red. She was extravagantly slender—the merest thread of a girl, though

not without little curves beneath her thin frock where little curves should be. (60-61)

This description of her superlative beauty becomes the point of departure for Lady Caroline in the novel. The reader first sees her as everyone else has seen her: a woman of thorough and perfect beauty. Then as the narration turns toward Lady Caroline's interior monologue, she becomes a round character who needs the garden to think through the trials she has faced and figure out how to move forward.

Although her physical appearance is just what it should be, her relationships with others, particularly men, are not. Her beauty prevents others from seeing her as a real person—"Nature was determined that she should look and sound angelic. She could never be disagreeable or rude without being completely misunderstood" (65-66). This quotation establishes Lady Caroline as the ideal object of chivalry—a beautiful and "extravagantly slender" lady whose voice augments this beauty as "into the eyes of every one of them, when they saw her, leapt this flame, and when they heard her it stayed there" (106). This may seem like a set of coveted attributes—wiles which would allow Lady Caroline to ensnare any man she chooses; however, through Lady Caroline's interior monologue, we learn that this is exactly what she has come to San Salvatore's garden to escape.

As Lady Caroline faces the burdens of her life as she sits in the garden, she begins to conquer these by first determining her relationship to her beauty. While sitting in the garden, Lady Caroline's interior monologue reveals that she relished the attention her beauty inspired when she first came out into society. However, "she who had entered the world so jauntily [. . .] began to distrust, and then to dislike, and soon to shrink away from, and presently to be indignant" about the attention she received (107). This occurred as it became apparent that she

had no control over who admired her or why. Many people objectified her: “she discovered with astonishment and rage, she had to defend herself. That look, that leaping look, meant that she was going to be grabbed at. Some of those who had it were more humble than others, especially if they were young, but they all, according to their several ability, grabbed” (106). This grabbing is rarely literal or physical; rather, it is metaphoric. Lady Caroline’s garden musings reveal that people have demanded social interaction from her that requires no conversation, wit, or intelligence. The grabber wishes only to admire her beauty, be in her presence, and hear her voice. In addition to subtly critiquing the roles and responsibilities of a beautiful woman in society, von Arnim is demonstrating why this beautiful woman needs the garden: her ability to be a complete person is often hindered by her beauty.

In order to deal with being grabbed, Lady Caroline retreats to the garden to think (88). She says, “What she wanted of this holiday was complete escape from all she had had before, she wanted the rest of complete contrast” (63). Rather than constantly being in public and “being admired, being dogged” (63), Lady Caroline seeks solace in the solitude of the garden, which leads to a deep, introspective contemplation. This contemplation begins as she responds to the people who enter her garden on the first day. Lotty and Rose’s conversation reveals Lady Caroline’s desires for solitude, and the cook’s assumption that Lady Caroline is married leads her to ponder about the social pressures of taking a husband: “After all, she could only marry one, anyhow; but you would think from the way everybody talked, and especially those persons who wanted to be husbands, that she could marry at least a dozen” (83). From this annoyance at her supposed purpose in life, Lady Caroline begins pondering deeper things. Considering the stars, “it [ . . . ] suddenly seemed as if her life had been a noise all about nothing” (89). Lady Caroline further ponders her sense of self, the development of which has been hindered by her

beauty's effect on men and people who develop a propensity to "grab" her. Part of determining this sense of self is the opportunity San Salvatore's garden provides her to think, not as the noble and intimidating Lady Caroline Dester, but as "Scrap."

Throughout *The Enchanted April*, von Arnim's narrator often refers to Lady Caroline as "Scrap," which—given Lady Caroline's mother's use of the name (110)—seems to be a sobriquet the Desters have for Lady Caroline. However, the use of the name "Scrap" generally coincides with feminist thoughts on the part of Lady Caroline. One such example comes forth in a conversation between Lady Caroline and Mrs. Fisher. At the beginning of this exchange, Lady Caroline states her purpose for coming to San Salvatore and retreating to the garden: "'What I want to do here,' [. . .] 'is to come to a conclusion'" (109). She also realizes "that almost any conclusion would do; the great thing was to get hold of something, catch something tight, cease to drift" (109). The ever-Victorian Mrs. Fisher seems to disapprove of this vague aim, which produces no valuable, tangible commodities: "Mrs. Fisher's little eyes surveyed her. 'I should say,' she said, 'that what a young woman like you wants is a husband and children'" (109). Mrs. Fisher scarcely expects the feministic reply: "'Well, that's one of the things I'm going to consider,' said Scrap amiably. 'But I don't think it would be a conclusion'" (109). In this short, simple response "Scrap" expresses a radical sentiment: marriage is neither the solution to a woman's problems, nor a guarantee of a woman's happiness.

Although she does not preclude the possibility of marriage in her life, Lady Caroline stresses the importance of coming to a conclusion in the garden—in other words, discovering the truth of her selfhood that reconciles her personality, her beauty, and her totality of being. In order to do so, Lady Caroline embarks on a solitary journey of thinking in an idyllic von Arnim

garden; she does not enter a marriage as a rite of passage, an answer to problems, or a realm of happiness as Mrs. Fisher seems to prescribe.

Another of the problems Lady Caroline confronts in the garden is how her beauty has complicated the development of her sense of self-worth. This is expressed in a glimpse into Lady Caroline's interior monologue in the garden: "Sometimes it was just as if she didn't belong to herself, wasn't her own at all, but was regarded as a universal thing, a sort of beauty-of-all-work" (106). Without belonging to oneself, she muses, it is difficult to develop a sense of self or a sense of self-worth. If Lady Caroline does not belong to herself, then she belongs to everyone. This is another way in which her beauty has been a burden to her. It draws people to interact with her and assume that she desires the things a young woman traditionally would.

This problem is detailed in an exchange between Lady Caroline and Mrs. Fisher, who is obsessed with the great Victorian writers, whom she knew personally and refers to as "friends." Mrs. Fisher interrupts Lady Caroline in the garden. As always, Lady Caroline is annoyed with this and tries to usher Mrs. Fisher away from her as soon as possible. The following exchange exhibits the problems that arise as a modern woman considering the options of modern life is confronted with a Victorian set of expectations:

"Well, you're a pretty creature," [Mrs. Fisher] said forgivingly. "It's a pity you weren't born fifty years ago. My friends would have liked looking at you."

"I'm very glad I wasn't," said Scrap. "I dislike being looked at."

"Absurd," said Mrs. Fisher, growing stern again. "That's what you are made for, young women like you. For what else, pray?" (109-10)

Here Mrs. Fisher claims Lady Caroline's existence as a pretty object whose only function is to be admired by great men, which reinforces the idea of Lady Caroline as "a universal thing"

belonging to everyone. However, Lady Caroline subtly resists being objectified in this fashion by stating that she “dislike[s] being looked at” (109). Her statement allows her to assert a sense of self, as her simple declaration precludes her from being the beautiful, admired property of Mrs. Fisher’s great men. This simple declaration also puzzles and exasperates the Victorian woman. Furthermore, the declaration is firm enough to drive “this absurd woman” away from Lady Caroline’s garden sanctuary of thought. This establishes the importance of the garden to Lady Caroline. Though she is often interrupted by gardeners, servants, and San Salvatore’s other tenants, Lady Caroline never welcomes anybody into her garden, tries to usher out anyone who enters it as soon as possible, often indulges in her contemplations while they are there, and returns to the thought processes that will allow her to take on a new life upon leaving San Salvatore and its garden at the end of the month.

In addition to seeking respite from the burden of being a beautiful object, Lady Caroline seeks healing in the garden. Like most Europeans in the 1920s, Lady Caroline’s life was changed by World War I. While in the garden pondering her life, she realizes that “The war finished Scrap. It killed the one man she felt safe with, whom she would have married, and it finally disgusted her with love. Since then she had been embittered. She was struggling as angrily in the sweet stuff of life as a wasp got caught in honey. Just as desperately did she try to unstuck her wings” (107). Thus, in addition to the annoyance of being constantly “grabbed” or objectified, Lady Caroline is struggling with the recovery from the loss of “the one man she felt safe with, whom she would have married” (107). Until she does, she will find love to be the disgusting “sweet stuff of life” (107). However, just as the garden provides Lady Caroline with the opportunity to recognize and resist others’ tendencies to grab her, the garden provides her a

meaningful process for finding someone else she could marry as long as he allows her to be more than a beautiful object.

As previously mentioned, each of the four characters in *The Enchanted April* is dynamic, but Lady Caroline's process of change is the longest and the most involved. In the last chapter of the novel, Lady Caroline is once again in the garden pondering the place fate has allotted her; however, this particular interior monologue is different from other such passages. Instead of being in an empty (or preferably empty) garden in the height of the day, Lady Caroline is one of many characters enjoying the garden during a moonlit night. The Wilkinses and the Arbuthnots share the garden with Lady Caroline, and, as one "only had to look at [Mrs. Arbuthnot] to know that here was Love" (237), Lady Caroline begins pondering the subject of love. She realizes, "If it had let her alone, if it had at least been moderate and infrequent, she might, she thought, have turned out a quite decent, generous-minded, kindly, human being. And what was she, thanks to this love [Mrs. Wilkins] talked so much about? Scrap searched for a just description. She was a spoilt, a sour, a suspicious, and a selfish spinster" (238). These seem to be the thoughts of an embittered young woman; however, given that the speaker is a classic beauty, the reflection becomes more feminist. Lady Caroline is "a spoilt, a sour, a suspicious, and a selfish spinster" (238) not because of unrequited love or star-crossed romance, but because an over-abundance of love has re-wrought her internal character until she has become unwilling to allow another to love her (they will only grab). However, all is not lost. As Lady Caroline continues to ponder love, she begins to reflect on her time at San Salvatore and the man who owns it—Mr. Briggs.

Within minutes of meeting Mr. Briggs, Lady Caroline observes that "he had the makings [. . .] of a passionately persistent grabber" (209). She has been annoyed with him and his grabbing since first meeting him; however, while in the garden, after declaring herself to be a

spinster, “Compunction seized Scrap” (241). She begins to consider how her ponderings at San Salvatore have made her “happier than she had been for ages and ages” (241) and what she really owes to Mr. Briggs. This compunction leads Lady Caroline to find Mr. Briggs in the moonlit garden to thank him and apologize for “her churlishness in the afternoon and at dinner” (242). This could be interpreted as the capitulation of a young woman who, after enjoying too much independence, acquiesces to a man and subjugates herself with gratitude and apologies. However, von Arnim’s tone and Scrap’s interiority preserve von Arnim’s progressively feminist characterization. Scrap observes, “Of course he hadn’t known she was being churlish. Of course her disagreeable inside was camouflaged as usual by the chance arrangement of her outside; but she knew it. She was churlish. She had been churlish to everybody for years” (242). Here Scrap is choosing to apologize and choosing to change. Scrap is not acquiescing to Mr. Briggs; she is realizing a new aspect of her ontology as informed by her ponderings and her ability to change and become more than just her beauty. This is seen in the dialogue following Scrap’s apology:

“Please,” said Scrap, still more earnestly, “won’t you clear your mind of everything except just truth? You don’t owe me anything. How should you?”

“I don’t owe you anything?” echoed Briggs. “Why, I owe you my first sight of—of—”

“Oh for goodness sake—for *goodness* sake,” said Scrap entreating, “do, please, be ordinary. Don’t be humble. Why should you be humble? It’s ridiculous of you to be humble. You’re worth fifty of me.” (241-42)

In this exchange, Scrap demands that Mr. Briggs treat her as a real person instead of worshipping her as the incarnation of Beauty. Scrap demands to be seen and treated as a person with flaws



and weaknesses because of the time she spent in the garden developing the capacity to demand to be seen for what lies beneath her gorgeous exterior.<sup>3</sup>

Although each of the women who rent San Salvatore for an enchanted April is a dynamic character, Lady Caroline's changes seem more involved than the other women's—it takes almost the entire novel for the change to take hold as Scrap thinks through her life and her interactions with others who would grab her. This mental process, which von Arnim depicts through interior monologue, allows her to discover her place in the world, not only as the beautiful Lady Caroline Dester, but also as Scrap—the human being who refuses to be idolized. Lady Caroline is able to reclaim her sense of self through reflective hours spent in a garden. In the case of Lady Caroline, deep pondering allows her to re-discover and reclaim Scrap, which allows her to love Mr. Briggs and demand that he love her for her person and not for her beauty. Von Arnim thus demonstrates the importance of a woman's understanding who is she and what she has to offer as she enters into relationships.

Scrap's retreat to the garden is in keeping with the model established by *Elizabeth and her German Garden*. The space of the garden provides the opportunity for the woman to retreat from the expectations and obligations of her place in society. As long as the woman protects the sanctity of her private garden space, it becomes more than a space for retreat. Von Arnim's garden is a space in which a woman can mourn, assess her past, and construct a self that is strong enough to demand equal footing with potential suitors. This pattern has been established for Elizabeth of *Elizabeth and the German Garden* in von Arnim scholarship, and this extends beyond Elizabeth von Arnim's early, semi-autobiographical garden romances in the case of Lady Caroline Dester from the 1922 novel *The Enchanted April*. However, in *Vera*, the 1921 novel, Lucy Enstwhistle rejects the experiences the garden can provide.

### Garden Theft and Vera's Death: Lucy Entwistle's Struggle for Identity in *Vera*

Elizabeth von Arnim's *Vera* acts as an interesting exception to the model of the healing, formative garden, as each of Lucy Entwistle's formative retreats to the garden are interrupted by the demanding Everard Wemyss, whom she meets and marries in the novel.<sup>4,5</sup> Because Lucy's time in the garden is interrupted, she does not have the formative experiences to become an adult woman with a fully-formed identity or sense of self. This allows Everard to bully, control, and possess her in the manner that led to the accidental death and possible suicide of his first wife, Vera. Lucy Entwistle is eighteen years old, and with no opportunity to take the time to reflect on what she wants or who she is, she is left to suffer the same fate as Vera.

Lucy could have formed her own identity in the garden at the seaside resort during the first few chapters of the novel but chooses to give Everard access to her garden instead. These events are the foundation of the narrative—Lucy's decision to allow Everard full access to the garden determines the course of the rest of the novel. She becomes abject with no space of her own. She tries to occupy the space Vera occupied, but when Everard enters even this domain and demands her attention, the reader knows that Lucy will share in Vera's fate: a mysterious accidental death and possible suicide in reaction to her husband.

*Vera* begins with "When the doctor had gone, and the two women from the village he had been waiting for were upstairs shut in with her dead father, Lucy went out into the garden and stood leaning on the gate staring at the sea" (1). In this simple sentence, Elizabeth von Arnim establishes the potential of the garden and the importance of the gate. After her father's death, Lucy Entwistle immediately retreats to the garden in order to think in solitude—similar to the pattern established in von Arnim's earlier works. According to Lynne Hapgood, "While gardens hold the power to influence and shape the identity of the women who care for them, women

occupy their gardens in an act of imaginative colonisation [. . .] making them vantage points for surveying their own lives, cultures, and locations” (93). So, Lucy’s relationship to this garden and her reasons for retreating to it demonstrate her state of mind in these first key scenes of the novel.

Lucy purposefully retreats from funeral arrangements and other matters in order to figure out who she is as an individual with the sudden prospect of living without her father’s constant companionship. As *Vera* begins, Lucy is eighteen years old and “She had had no thought since she grew up for anybody but her father. There was no room for any other thought, so completely did he fill her heart” (1). Lucy is the only child of a widowed scholar. His death leaves her alone in the world, save one aunt who is to travel down for the funeral. In order to mourn his death and consider her new position as a woman alone in the world, Lucy withdraws to the solitude of the garden—the site of healing and mediation in many von Arnim novels. While in the garden, “Lucy stood staring at the sea, her face as empty of expression as the bright blank world before her” (1). This is evidence of the potential the garden has to offer Lucy. Her face is “empty of expression,” demonstrating that she doesn’t know how she feels about the loss of her father and her new position in the world; however, the comparison between her expressionless face and “the bright blank world before her” suggests that she is not merely numb. There is potential for her to consider her options while in the garden and fill the blank spaces with a definite character. As the world is “bright” in addition to being “blank,” there is hope for Lucy’s future in these first few moments in the garden. This observation is the beginning of Lucy’s process of introspection, which has the potential to allow her to deal with her father’s death and the feelings of being alone in the world as an adult for the first time in her life. As she fills the “bright blank world

before her” (1), the garden also has the potential to assist her in forming an identity as an individual, adult woman, and find happiness and fulfillment in her future and in her decisions.

It is not long before this process is interrupted, but there is evidence that it has begun in these early chapters. For example, while in the garden, Lucy thinks about her father: “He was the most amusing companion to her, the most generous friend, the most illuminating guide, the most adoring father; and now he was dead, and she felt nothing. Her father. Dead. For ever. She said the words over to herself. They meant nothing. She was going to be alone. Without him. Always. She said the words over to herself. They meant nothing” (2). The repetition demonstrates the introspection typical of a von Arnim protagonist. The garden has afforded Lucy the opportunity to think about her father’s death and what it means to her and for her daily life. She suddenly finds herself alone and is trying to process what it will mean to be without her father for the rest of her life. While in the garden she thinks, “She had taken care of him and he had been delicate ever since she could remember. And ever since she could remember he had been everything in life to her” (1). This quote makes it clear that Lucy’s father has always been the center of her life, and caring for him seems to have been her main occupation in life. Lucy finds herself considering who she is now that the focal point of her life is gone. This is the beginning of a thought process that could lead to healing, self-realization, and identity.

At this point, Lucy is just beginning the garden process typical of a von Arnim heroine, which can involve grieving, thinking about her place in the world, and pondering who she is and what she wants out of life. Lucy becomes somewhat numb as she finds herself unable to understand or to derive meaning from the words: “Her father. Dead. For ever” (2). The feeling of numbness generated by this lack of concrete meaning also becomes a part of this process, as most von Arnim heroines experience some sort of manifestation of angst or grief at a loss,

whether its source is war, an urban environment, women's issues, or natural death. Lynne Hapgood claims, "The garden paid homage to nature, healing the sense of rupture between human beings and their environment, and ameliorating the loss of self-determination created by an urban environment" (94). This is also true in Lucy's case, although her source of grief is the numbness experienced at the loss of her father instead of the urbanity Hapgood describes. In *Vera* and in von Arnim's other works, the garden is the healing space where a modern woman could face her malaise, form her identity, and become more prepared to face the world.

It is significant that Lucy begins this process. She has intentionally left the house and the work of funeral preparations taking place within to retreat to the garden and think through her father's death and what it means for her life. She is alone and anticipates that "She was going to be alone. Without him. Always" (2). This is a significant aspect of the process as she is in the nascent stages of forming her identity and dismissing her grief, which has been seen in other von Arnim works.

However, this process does not last long for Lucy. As she is mourning her father, Everard Wemyss sees her and becomes fascinated with her. Despite having come to the seaside resort to mourn the recent death of his wife, Vera, when he sees Lucy, "his attention was surprised away from himself and almost he had stopped to examine the strange creature more closely" (3). After pausing to consider this young woman who takes no notice of him, he moves on, but "at the end of the garden where the road left it behind [. . .] he hesitated, looked back, went on a yard or two, hesitated again, stopped[, paused . . .] and then very slowly turned and went past the belt of bushes towards the gate again" (3). Although Everard claims that "[he] must speak to some one" (3), he seems to be drawn to the garden as much as he is drawn to Lucy. This drive to speak and interact with someone, and his fascination with Lucy's gaze "that simply looked through him as

he went by” (3), is a motive for his stopping and the beginning of his fixation, which will lead to Lucy becoming his second wife. However, it is not merely Lucy that pulls him in. He is able to leave her behind and move down the path until he reaches the end of her garden—which is adjacent to the path—then his progress is arrested and he turns back, desperate for company. Something about the garden itself in addition to Lucy forces him to break his “code” of not drawing attention to himself (3). Seeing Lucy is not enough to make him stop and seek human contact (3); rather, the garden pulls him out of his purposeless wandering and draws him in to face the burden of his grief at Vera’s passing.

As Everard turns back up the path to talk to Lucy, he thinks, “No, he couldn’t bear this, he must speak to some one. That girl—with those strange eyes she wasn’t just ordinary. She wouldn’t mind letting him talk to her for a little, perhaps sit in the garden with her a little. She would understand” (4). Everard not only wishes to speak to Lucy, he would like to “sit in the garden with her” (4). This further demonstrates the garden’s appeal to Everard as he wishes to place the interaction he needs in the garden. Additionally, as Everard is “a tour de force of comic creepiness, perhaps the most appalling domestic villain ever written” as Katie Roiphe describes him (130), it is significant that even this man, who is often seen as a comic villain, is drawn to the garden as a restorative mourning space. While giving an explanation of *Vera*’s status as a dark comedy, Stoneman sheds light on this significance: “although Lucy remains free of ‘malice,’ Wemyss does not change his ways. The effect of the story for the reader, therefore, is extremely chilling, since we recognise a dangerous syndrome without being able to help its immediate victim” (111). As the garden is a space for change and growth, a static character being drawn to the garden to ease the loneliness society has forced upon him at the loss of Vera demonstrates the power of the garden as a site of healing.

However, Everard does not seek solace from introspection in the garden; rather, he seeks healing from conversing with the girl in the garden, which allows the garden to remain a site of female introspection leading to identity. This male villain cannot access the space on his own. Not only does he lack legal access to the property, he does not desire isolation in the garden; he wishes to “sit in the garden with [Lucy]” (4). This makes the garden Lucy’s space, a female space. Everard wants neither solitude nor the space to think through his mourning process, both of which the garden can provide. He wants to forget what he later refers to as “that ghastly business of Vera’s” (22) and to intrude on Lucy’s space because he believes that by talking to her he can forget or ignore his problems.

#### The Garden Gate Determines Lucy’s Fate

When Everard first sees Lucy, she is not only in a garden; she is leaning on a gate between the garden and the path Everard is walking down. This gate becomes an interstitial space between the garden and the world. Lucy has control over this gate: she can keep it shut or swing it open either to let Everard into her garden or to leave the garden and enter his world. The first action changes the garden space from a place of solitary, formative female introspection to a place of halting, frustrated exchange between a man and a woman. The second action leads to Lucy’s leaving the introspective peace of her garden to go with Everard according to his will.

In order for Everard to enter Lucy’s garden, he must interrupt the introspective process she has begun and demand that she swing the gate open and give him entrance. When Everard initially walks by Lucy, she hears his footsteps as he passing between her and the ocean, but “she did not notice him, for she was noticing nothing but her thoughts, and he passed in front of her quite close, and was gone” (3). In this moment, she is fully partaking of the benefits of the garden by meditating so intently that people do not register on her consciousness. She does not

react to Everard in any way. After Everard turns up the path and meets Lucy at the gate, she is in a similar state, and it takes a lot of effort to get her attention. He first tries to convince Lucy to give him a glass of water, but his pleas go unnoticed until he asks her “his voice trembling with unhappiness, ‘if [she] would let [him] come into the garden a minute and rest’” (4). The text says that it is “the sound of the genuine wretchedness in his voice” (5) that makes Lucy break her focus and notice him. However, this “wretchedness” is manifested in a plea to enter Lucy’s garden, and she responds to Everard only after he asks to enter (5). In addition to the empathy Lucy seems to feel for Everard in this instance, this demonstrates the value she places in her garden as she is willing to arrest her introspective mourning for “this distressed warm stranger” (5) only after he mentions the garden. The mere mention, however, is not enough for her to sacrifice her solitary mourning. She tries to offer him water, but he again demands entry “into the garden [. . .]—just to sit a minute with a human being” (5). Lucy is overwhelmed by “the strange man’s evident affliction” (5), but continues to refuse him entry because of her father’s death. When Everard learns of this death, he insists that these “‘two stricken ones must talk together.’ And still covering her hands with one of his, with the other he unlatched the gate and walked in” (5). At this moment, Everard usurps all of Lucy’s authority over the gate.

Similar to the way Lucy’s presence in the garden makes it her space to be introspective, Lucy’s hand on the gate represents her power to leave the garden for the world or allow others into the garden. By opening this gate and entering the garden, Everard takes this power from Lucy. Her acquiescence in this act—partially due to her apathy—leads to future acquiescence with dire consequences. Everard’s forcible seizure of the gate and entrance into the garden changes its nature and function. Instead of the solitary thought process that could lead to identity, maturity, and a healthy mourning process for Lucy, the garden becomes a space where Everard



forces the young, numb Lucy to share his griefs through conversation. As the conversation through the gate is marked by Everard's frustrated, demanding insistence on communicating and Lucy's inability to answer, process, or meet his demands, it is logical to conclude that this model of conversation will continue in the garden. This will change the space from the female's healing, introspective garden to a site of frustrated, demanding exchange between the sexes wherein the female acquiesces to the male's demands.

This intrusion on Lucy's garden space and introspection is the first of a series. Everard's intrusions will not only prevent Lucy from thinking through her own mourning process but will lead to a tragic and controlled domestic future. Lucy's only outlet becomes identification with the suicidal Vera because, as Elizabeth asks in *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, "with people dropping in at all hours and wanting to talk to you, how are you to get on with your life [. . .] and read your books, and dream your dreams to your satisfaction?" (37). Everard drops in on Lucy's meditation and interrupts her mourning process, her life, her reading, and her dreams—the things that will make her a happy, mindful adult.

After spending a few days together, Lucy and Everard also become engaged to be married over the gate. This surprises and shocks Lucy, who has only viewed Everard as a friendly uncle, sent to care for her needs as she mourns her father's death. While standing with the gate between them, Everard begins kissing Lucy. At first, Lucy's interior monologue shows resistance to these kisses:

[Lucy] hung on to the gate while her thoughts flew about in confusion within her. These kisses—and his wife just dead—and dead so terribly—how long would she have to stand there with this going on—she couldn't lift up her head, for then she felt it would only get worse—she couldn't turn and run into the house, because he

was holding her hands. He oughtn't to have—oh, he oughtn't to have—it wasn't fair. (32)

In this passage, Lucy deems Everard's actions to be inappropriate as Vera has died so recently and shouldn't be replaced so quickly. The phrases "he oughtn't to have" and "it wasn't fair" apply to both Lucy and Vera. Lucy is not prepared for these kisses. She doesn't seek them, and she is surprised by them because they are not engaged. Everard "oughtn't to have" kissed her (32). However, he also "oughtn't to have" kissed her because he should still be mourning Vera who has been dead for less than a month. Lucy supposes that Everard loved Vera and thinks he should not be moving on so quickly. As Lucy faces these pressures, she clings to the gate as an anchor. Again, she is in the garden and Everard is on the path with the gate between them; however, Everard takes these kisses with the same force with which he entered the garden. Again Everard usurps Lucy's power to swing the gate open or keep it closed by continuing to kiss her until she remembers their shared grief and becomes his affianced. Once again, Lucy's opinions, thoughts, and preferences are merely an obstacle to be overcome before Everard can swing open the gate, intrude upon her garden, and make her a part of his life.

After the engagement, Everard finds "even more wonderful moments after dinner in the darkening garden [. . .] and they hadn't got the gate between them, and Lucy of her own accord laid her cheek against his coat, nestling her head into it as though there indeed she knew that she was safe" (33). Despite Lucy's acquiescence in this situation, this description demonstrates Everard's triumph. The garden is "darkening" (33): it has become the site of exchange between Lucy and Everard rather than a site for isolated thinking. The garden has forfeited the power of Lucy's solitude, especially since Lucy does not resist Everard as he enters the garden and her life, thus removing all impediments between him and his "little love" (43). In this moment, Lucy

loses the power to make choices that contradict Everard's and the opportunity to create an identity of her own.

Lucy's experiences in the garden, Everard's forced entry into the garden, and the couple's exchanges through the gate establish the pattern followed for the rest of the novel. Lucy's attempts to use the garden as a solitary, introspective space are thwarted by Everard's seizure of the gate, forced entry into the garden, and insistence on kissing and becoming engaged to Lucy. At The Willows, Everard's ancestral home, Lucy responds to Everard's domestic tyranny by suppressing her thoughts, longing for a space in which to think, and taking some refuge in Vera's room, possessions, and identity. Because all of Lucy's attempts to form an identity in the garden in keeping with von Arnim's model have been interrupted, she has no identity of her own and seems to find no option besides taking on Vera's identity as she takes her place as Everard's wife. Although the novel ends before Lucy does drastic violence to herself, this identification with Vera, coupled with Vera's tragic end, demonstrates that Lucy's lack of a personal identity is fated to meet the same tragic end. The failure of the garden in *Vera* reinforces the necessity of the garden being a solitary, introspective female space in Elizabeth von Arnim's body of work.

#### Gardenless Thinking and the Process of Abjection

Lucy's inability to use the garden extends through her engagement and her marriage. At no point after her marriage or during her engagement does Lucy sit in the garden and think about her life, her decisions, the tragedies she has faced, or how her life has been shaped as Caroline did in *The Enchanted April*. However, as she lives her life, she often thinks about the problems she faces with Everard and the distance this places between them, whether they are in the same room or not. Lucy recognizes this lack in her life: "she was never alone. She hadn't realized how

completely she would never be alone, or, if alone, not sure for one minute to the other of going on being alone” (76). In this moment Lucy recognizes the problems of being married to Everard. She is either expected to be at his side or should expect to be interrupted at a moment’s notice. Lucy loves Everard and wants to be by his side, but the realization that she cannot ever be completely or securely alone disheartens her. She further reflects: “Always in her life there had been intervals during which she recuperated in solitude from any strain; now there were none. Always there had been places she could go to and rest in quietly, safe from interruption; now there were none” (76). This solitary, uninterrupted recuperation is what the garden would have provided Lucy; but, since Lucy allows Everard to swing the garden gate open and enter, she has forfeited the opportunity to rest quietly from the strain of being married to Everard. He is always there either physically or as an intrusion into Lucy’s thoughts. However, as the “strain” (76) of her marriage and Everard’s demands are still present in Lucy’s life, she must find other means of recuperation and seeks it in thinking about her problems with Everard in whatever situation she may find herself.

This thinking—whether it is aborted or not—is always focused on Lucy’s relationships. Lucy is concerned with how to meet the conflicting expectations she and Everard have of what it means to be Everard’s wife. Lucy is not trying to determine her identity as an individual person apart from him; she is trying to understand and decide how to handle the circumstances in which she finds herself. This process is not conducted in a garden and is not about her having a distinct space in which to think and be. She thinks through the experiences she is having either as she is having them or immediately after, always seeking a way to understand what happened to upset Everard, what she can do to fix it, and how this will shape her marriage and her happiness for the rest of her life. In keeping with her inability to be alone, Everard is likely to interrupt these

thoughts at any moment to exchange affections or make her suffer and pay for a petty offense of some sort.

On some level, Lucy wants to be connected to Everard in the matter he prescribes during their engagement: “there should be the most perfect frankness between lovers, while as for husband and wife there oughtn’t to be a corner anywhere about either of them, mind, body, or soul, which couldn’t be revealed to the other one” (83). However, Lucy eventually begins resisting Everard’s model of marital bliss as she has thoughts that she either doesn’t want to share with Everard or feels that she cannot: “there were perfect crowds of thoughts in her mind that she was thoroughly ashamed of” (84). Most of these thoughts deal directly with Vera and her fears about occupying a house so recently filled with death. At one point, she presents this fear to Everard, who responds: “‘You mustn’t think,’ he said. ‘You mustn’t be morbid [ . . . ]’” (80). While in this instance, Everard is attempting to quash a discussion of Vera, this admonition to refrain from thinking extends beyond Vera. Throughout the novel, whether intentionally or not, Everard prevents Lucy from thinking. He often interrupts her thinking processes, tries to control her actions and opinions, and views her as an extension of himself without her own thoughts, feelings, or responses to difficult situations.

Sometimes Everard is successful. At one point “[Lucy thinks] desperately, ‘The only thing to be done with marriage is to let it wash over one.’ For the rest of that day she let it wash; unresistingly. She couldn’t think any more. She couldn’t feel any more,—not that day” (143). This is the type of thinking that Everard would be pleased with as Lucy has no thoughts that resist any aspect of her marriage. However, more often, Lucy is not as numb as this passage describes. She often attempts to think through her problems; however, she also suppresses thoughts that could make Everard unhappy or that force her to face the realities of the situations

in which she finds herself. In one instance, Lucy makes “a violent lunge after her thoughts and strangle[s] them” (107). This is a far cry from the solitary garden sanctuary in which she could have withdrawn from Everard and his demands. Instead of having her own space to work through her thoughts and perhaps think some thoughts that had nothing to do with Everard, she finds herself dwelling on him and her failures to meet his expectations with Everard always lurking in the room, down the hall, or at the back of her mind.

Lucy’s fear of Everard leads to her suppressing her thoughts and becoming “abject” (132).<sup>6</sup> Although Lucy has desires to have a part of herself that is distant from Everard, this should not be mistaken for the kind of independence and strength that allowed Lady Caroline to insist that Briggs see her as a human being. Lady Caroline acts according to her own desires and conclusions after spending a score of days in a garden determining what they were. She is able to convince a man to treat her and speak to her in a manner that will allow her to be happy despite a life of incessant objectification. On the other hand, Lucy acquiesces to Everard to the point of abjection. Lucy declares herself to be abject in every instance. At first, during her honeymoon, she sees her abjection as the natural consequence of being in love. She thinks:

Yes, she was extremely abject, she reflected, lying awake at night considering her behaviour during the day. Love had made her so. Love did make one abject, for it was full of fear of hurting the beloved. The assertion of the Scriptures that perfect love casteth out fear only showed, seeing that her love for Everard was certainly perfect, how little the Scriptures really knew what they were talking about. (86)

This passage demonstrates the result of Lucy’s fear of Everard, which has led her to carefully control her actions in order to avoid hurting or displeasing him. It also demonstrates that Lucy considers her love and her conclusions about her love to be of a higher authority than scripture,

which would have been the highest authority in earlier time periods. These are Lucy's justifications for being abject in her marriage.

Perhaps if Everard were also abject, the reader could accept Lucy's justifications. However, Everard continues to dominate and control Lucy's thoughts. She lives in constant fear of the danger of upsetting him or accidentally acting against his wishes to any degree. This is evidenced in the following: "Implicit in her kiss was an appeal not to let anything she said or did spoil his birthday, to forgive her, to understand. And at the back of her mind, quite uncontrollable, quite unauthorized ran beneath these other thoughts this thought: 'I am certainly abject'" (92). Here Lucy silently pleads with her husband to forgive her for upsetting him in any way before she does anything to upset him. Then von Arnim's narrator provides the reader with the conclusion: Lucy is "certainly abject" (92). She feels the need to kowtow to her husband while he remains ever demanding, ever entitled. Her abject status ensures that she will bend or break under these demands. Although she recognizes the abject nature of her position, she does not try to change this and attempts to please Everard instead.

After seeing the problems in her relationship with Everard, Lucy begins seeking some sort of solace. With the solace of the garden being unavailable to Lucy due to Everard's proclivity for interrupting her, Lucy must look for solace through inhabiting the space Vera has vacated—the space of being Everard's wife, the space he pushed her towards and manipulated her into. Thus, after the sanctuary of the garden (both at The Willows and at the seaside hotel in the first chapters) is denied her, Lucy finds space, solace, and identity in Vera's room. Here she begins thinking about the failings in her relationship to Everard in a more honest and detailed level than when she was thinking about them wherever she found herself. She begins entertaining the possibility that Everard shares some of the blame for their problems. Up to this

point, she has felt guilty for her behavior and her failings as a wife. She has been ashamed of anything she has done that has fallen short of Everard's expectations for her as wife and fiancé, and she has been even more ashamed of her chief silliness: her reluctance to deal with anything associated with Vera's death. However, at this point in the novel, she seems to be more willing to be honest about the failings of their relationship, particularly those that are solely the fault of Everard.

Lucy's understanding of Vera comes from Everard's description (and his manifold complaints); however, this understanding changes as she gets to know Vera through the artifacts she has left behind. Everard is a demanding individual who views the people in his life as entities that exist only to fulfill specific functions to make him happy. As Everard is so obsessed with the details of his life, he remembers all of Vera's failings, which generally involve acting in a way that conflicts with his wishes or whims. For example, on his birthday, his wife exists to participate in a "ritual": the gardener places a vase of kingcups on the table, Everard sees them and says, "It's my birthday and Spring's," and his wife wishes him many happy returns while refraining from mentioning the actual first day of Spring, which is two weeks prior to Everard's birthday (95). Having his wife fulfill nuanced expectations like this is so important to Everard that he still remembers the all too painful year when there were no flowers and Vera, who "was so much used to the cue" (95-96), forgot. When Lucy fails to complete the ritual because she doesn't know it exists, Everard starts a fight and considers his birthday to be "ruined."

Thus Everard's view of Vera is reflected in Lucy's thoughts about her: "she was absent-minded and not very intelligent; indeed, she was rather troublesomely unintelligent, doing obstinate, foolish things, and at last doing that fatal, obstinate, foolish thing which so dreadfully ended her" (98). Everard sees Vera as "absent-minded" insofar as he had to rouse her from her



thoughts to get her attention or because she did unacceptable things like refraining to button up every single button on the piano cover after she played (121-22). He sees her as “obstinate” and “foolish” when she insists on spending time on her own or when she abuses her books by “always reading them” (127). He sees her accidental death (or possible suicide) not as a tragedy to which he may have contributed, but as “that fatal, obstinate, foolish thing which so dreadfully ended her” (98). This is Everard’s opinion of Vera, and as Lucy has never met anyone beside Everard who actually knew Vera, she has relied on his version of her and her character to the extent that she views Vera through Everard’s eyes.

However, upon arriving at The Willows and seeing a life-sized photograph of Vera in the dining room, Lucy’s opinion of her begins to change. As she observes the photograph, Lucy first debunks Everard’s assertion that Vera was a fool. She observes, “This Vera was certainly intelligent. You couldn’t have eyes like that and be a fool” (98). Despite Lucy’s somewhat faulty logic this observation is important, as she is beginning to respect Vera and her capacity for rational thought. However, Vera also becomes more personable as Lucy further observes: “And the expression of her mouth—what had she been trying not to laugh at that day? Did she know she was going to be enlarged and hang for years in the bleak dining-room facing her father-in-law, each of them eyeing the other from their walls, while three times a day the originals sat down beneath their own pictures at the long table and ate?” (98). Here von Arnim lends some of her famous sense of humor to Vera, who can laugh at the ridiculousness caused by her husband’s demands. This endears her to Lucy as she sees her “predecessor’s” courage and strength in the humor with which she faces the situation in which Lucy finds herself (99). In this passage, Lucy begins seeing things in Vera that Everard would never see and couldn’t pass on to her. She sees her sense of humor, her beauty, her intelligence, and her sense of irony. Most important to Lucy,

she also sees Vera's understanding of her situation. Lucy recognizes that although Vera acquiesces to Everard's ideas and opinions by doing things like posing for ridiculously oversized photographs, she retains her own opinions and her own will. As Lucy sees this strength in Vera, she begins to turn to it when she faces her own problems.

Up until this point, Lucy had been afraid of anything that dealt with Vera. She was shocked to learn that nothing of Vera's had been removed from the house and that she would be expected to sleep in Vera's bed and use Vera's sitting room (85). However, as she begins to experience the wrath of a disappointed Everard without any source of solace or companionship, she reasons that Vera must have experienced similar pain and frustration at Everard's hand, and she turns to Vera for solace and comfort. Lucy first entertains this idea when Everard locks her out of the library after a fight. She thinks, "But where could she go? Where in the whole house was any refuge, any comfort? The only person who could have told her anything, who could have explained, who *knew*, was Vera. Yes—she would have understood. Yes, yes—Vera" (114-15). It becomes natural for Lucy to turn to the only person who has ever experienced the trauma of being married to Everard: Vera.

However, Vera's death makes this connection somewhat problematic. Lucy cannot cry on her shoulder, discuss the problems with her or receive advice from her. Instead, she determines to "go to Vera's room, get as close to her mind as she could—search, find something, some clue . . ." (115). In this moment, Lucy does more than "make common cause with her predecessor" (Stoneman 113). Rather than relying on the empathy and strength that could come with merely knowing that someone had faced her experiences before her, Lucy tries to "get as close to her mind as she could" (115). This implies that she wants to get as close to Vera's inner thoughts as possible. Any verbal dissention would be viewed as "obstinate" and would receive

punishment from Everard; however, Vera's photograph reveals strength and rebellion running beneath the surface of her speech and action. Lucy begins to take on the attributes she saw in Vera's photograph as she tries to "get as close to [. . . Vera's] mind as she could" (115). Immediately after discovering the power of taking on Vera's mind, Lucy realizes that "she wasn't frightened any more. Everything was trying to frighten her, but she wasn't going to be frightened. For some reason or other things were all trying together to-day to see if they could crush her, beat out her spirit. But they weren't going to" (115). This is more spirit and resolve than Lucy has shown in any other part of the novel, and it is significant that this comes immediately after turning to Vera for help. Lucy observes this strength in Vera's portrait and is able to access it when she begins taking on Vera's identity.

This turning to Vera for strength begins as an attempt to understand Vera and the events leading to her death, but soon it becomes a way to escape from Everard. After Everard accuses her of "sexual allurements" (119) and rejects her attempt to reconcile when she goes to him naked except for a blanket wrapped around her shoulders, Lucy considers whether or not she will be able to "bear him making love to her" (120). At this point, Lucy's attitude towards her relationship with Everard changes. She thinks: "Loneliness. She lifted her head and looked round the room. No, she wasn't lonely. There was still— Suddenly she went to the bookshelves, and began pulling out the books quickly, hungrily, reading their names, turning over their pages in a kind of starving hurry to get to know, to get to understand, Vera" (120). In this scene, Lucy chooses to counteract the rejection she faces at the hand of her husband by turning to his ex-wife. She actively pursues solace through the things Vera has left behind. This directly contrasts her approach to her relationship with Everard, which is marked by her abjectification and her passive

acquiescence to his demands whether they be allowing him entrance into her garden, accepting his marriage proposal, or changing her behavior.

Lucy continues to turn to Vera for support. She looks to Vera for strength as the veteran Mrs. Wemyss: “Vera would help her. Vera never was beaten. Vera had had fifteen years of not being beaten before she—before she had that accident. And there must have been heaps of days just like this one, with the wind screaming and Vera up in her room and Everard down in his—locked in, perhaps—and yet Vera had managed, and her spirit wasn’t beaten out” (115). Lucy wants to foster and develop this “spirit” of Vera’s. Lucy’s Aunt Dot later tells Everard, “From my knowledge of [Lucy], I’m quite sure she hasn’t the staying power of Vera” (188), recognizing and pointing to Lucy’s weakness when compared to Vera’s strength and “staying power” (188). However, Vera is not an ideal model of behavior, for whether it was a suicidal attempt to escape or a tragic accident providing relief, Vera is no longer Mrs. Wemyss. Lucy laments this loss as she reaches after Vera: “oh, if only Vera weren’t dead! If only, *only* Vera weren’t dead! But her mind lived on—her mind was in that room, in every littlest thing in it—” (115). Without Vera’s physical presence Lucy turns to Vera’s room for solace. Through the thought process described in the latter half of the novel, Lucy has developed an entirely favorable opinion of Vera, which Everard would object to. This allows her to go from fearing Vera and her room to intentionally occupying her space as a way to find solace. Indeed, “It seemed now to Lucy, as she hurried upstairs, that the room in the house she had most shrunk from was the one place where she might hope to find comfort” (115). Here, Lucy turns to Vera’s room to provide the type of safe space that the garden could have provided before she allowed Everard’s entrance. However, Everard does not respect the sanctity of this space and again enters and demands that the abject Lucy take full responsibility for their birthday disagreements and

apologize to him (129). This makes Vera's room a highly permeable space. Lucy can withdraw there, but Everard may enter at any time without notice, thereby invading Lucy's space and her thoughts. Vera's room provides Lucy with a refuge of sorts, but is not a garden sanctuary away from men, duty, and obligation.

Lucy seems to have lost the ability to turn to any sort of garden space at The Willows for the solace and identity she craves. Earlier in the novel, Lucy seems to feel that Vera's death imbues the garden with a sinister air. While Lucy and Everard are passing by the garden at The Willows, Lucy "pressed very close to him, and put up her face to his, shutting her eyes, for so she shut out the desolating garden with its foreground of murderous flags" (100). After falling out of the third-story window, Vera was found on these "murderous flags" (100). According to this description, Vera's death makes the garden a "desolate" place Lucy shrinks from (100). However, Vera's death is a rejection of the abjectification Lucy experiences. Vera insisted on an identity apart from Everard. When he wouldn't grant this, she separated herself from him through death. Landing in the garden can be read as a reclamation of the space of identity and introspection robbed from Vera. As Lucy finds Vera's death to be horrific at this point in the novel, she shrinks away from this particular garden as the site of death. However, as Lucy turns to Vera, it is possible that she may forget this violent imagery and turn to the garden through Vera. However, Everard's entitlement to Vera's room would probably extend to her garden as well. Furthermore, he may come and go as he pleases or demands, especially at The Willows, which makes the garden there part of Wemyss's domain rather than the restorative space it could be. Also, because Lucy has allowed Everard access to the garden, it would not be the space she needs or desires to form an identity separate from being Mrs. Wemyss and the inheritor of Vera's

title and Everard's expectations. This leaves Lucy with two options: she may allow her abject state to extend into the garden or she may reclaim it through violent means as Vera did.

In addition to being unable to turn to the garden, Lucy is unable to turn to Vera's room for the introspection and identity that a garden could provide. In *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, Elizabeth explains: "The garden is the place I go to for refuge and shelter, not the house. In the house are duties and annoyances, servants to exhort and admonish, furniture, and meals; but out there blessings crowd round me at every step—it is [. . .] there that I feel protected and at home, and every flower and weed is a friend and every tree a lover" (28). This is linked to Catherine Alexander's identification of the garden as a liminal space between the public and private spheres (858), which is in keeping with Sherry Ortner's claims about the female association with nature and the male association with culture. The garden's liminality allows it to become a personal space for the woman to escape the duties, pressures, and concerns that she would have to face in the house, even in a personal sitting room. This demonstrates what a well-defended garden could give Lucy that Vera's room does not: a space away from the duties of being Wemyss's wife and the mistress of the house. Vera's room gives this to a certain extent, but Wemyss views it as a space that he can always invade as it is part of his house and therefore his domain. Lucy does not protect the room, the garden, or her thoughts from his intrusion as Scrap and Elizabeth protect their garden spaces. Her abject state prevents her from doing so. Because of Wemyss's ownership and the likelihood of his intrusion, Vera's room cannot function as a garden sanctuary; rather, Vera's room becomes the space in which Lucy connects with her predecessor as she faces the victimhood of being Mrs. Everard Wemyss.

Lucy's inheritance as Mrs. Wemyss seems to come with an ominous fate. Towards the end of the novel, Lucy gets so ill that she can't get out of bed. From this point forward, she and

her thoughts are never the subject of the narrator's focus again. Everard and Aunt Dot battle over the extent of Lucy's sickness and who should care for her. This battle ends with Aunt Dot banished from Lucy's life. Because of this, the novel ends with Lucy as a passive, abject victim of her husband with only his dead wife to comfort her. Aunt Dot addressing Everard says, ". . . unless you're kinder than you're being at this moment, it won't be anything like fifteen years this time" (189). Lucy's source of strength is Vera, whose own strength failed her. Aunt Dot and von Arnim imply that Lucy won't last long as Mrs. Wemyss. She has no foundation and no refuge for herself and will be left an abject wretch.

### Conclusion

The function of the garden in Elizabeth von Arnim's *The Enchanted April* and *Vera* leads to a deeper understanding of von Arnim's works in general. *The Enchanted April* gives a fictional instance of the central process of developing an identity that is so central in *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer*. Instead of using the process as a moment of escape from husband and duties, Lady Caroline goes to the garden to confront the whole of her past. As she resists being "grabbed" and begins interrogating what the process of continually being grabbed has done to her, she is able to process her past, heal, and take control of how others treat her. This allows her to reach out to Mr. Briggs on her terms and develop a relationship that goes beyond his appreciating her beauty and grabbing at her.

At the beginning of *Vera*, Lucy Entwistle has the same opportunity to face her griefs and take control of her own life. However, Lucy forgoes this opportunity by allowing Everard Wemyss to sweep into her garden sanctuary and begin controlling her life. Lucy spends much of the latter half of the novel thinking, but it fails to fulfill the function that thinking in a garden would have provided her. Lucy's thinking fails to lead to the formation of an identity, heal

wounds or griefs, or provide a space in which to be truly alone without fulfilling duties expected of her. In the end, she begins turning to Vera for solace, but this is an incomplete solution for the magnitude of the problems she faces. Vera's room is a permeable space that Everard feels free to enter at any moment. Also, although Vera is stronger than Lucy, Vera only lasted fifteen years in this relationship before dying under unfavorable circumstances. As the nature of Lucy's relationship with Everard leaves her abject, it can be inferred that she will last even less time living under the demands of being Mrs. Wemyss. Without a garden space in which to be truly alone and develop a sense of self, Lucy is left to cower in fear and acquiesce to his demands without the strength to openly resist Everard.

These instances demonstrate that the process of retreating to the garden in von Arnim's body of work is vital to the development of her characters and her plots. It is not merely a function of the garden memoirs featuring Elizabeth of the German Garden. It is a vital aspect of her later fiction. Von Arnim is arguing that women need a space in which to think and be. In cases where isolation and healing need to occur—such as Lady Caroline's and Lucy's cases—a drawing room or a library that can be constantly interrupted will not do. A character must be able to withdraw to and adamantly defend a garden sanctuary. If she is able to do this, she will be able to take control of her own life and decisions. If not, she will become the victim of husbands or others who are in authority over her. The garden thus becomes a feminist space in which a woman can create a future and a life for herself instead of acquiescing to the demands placed upon her by the expectations of others, especially husbands or lovers.



## Notes

1. Talia Schaffer uses von Arnim's early texts as a counterexample to the radical feminism of the period. Jennifer Shepherd considers her a "Middlebrow Feminist" who effectively appeals to similar readers at the fin de siècle while dealing with *The Woman Problem*. Juliane Römhild responds to Schaffer and Shepherd to further establish von Arnim as a middlebrow feminist who addresses themes of place, identity and ownership in *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer*. Finally, Shelia Haines looks at von Arnim's treatment of New Woman issues, noting the apparent contradiction of Elizabeth's furthering the causes of freedom, space and identity, while mocking an overtly New Woman character in *Elizabeth and her German Garden*.

2. Sarah Bilston argues that in *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, the garden functions as a space of healing and identity for Elizabeth in a way that forecasts my claims about *The Enchanted April* and *Vera*. Lynne Hapgood considers the impact of the 1890s "garden romance" genre on conceptions of the suburban garden at this time. Her claims about the space are in keeping with mine, Bilston's, and the above authors.

3. For example, Netta Syrett's "Thy Heart's Desire," a New Woman story, ends with a widow rejecting a lover's marriage proposal that would ensure her a lifetime of security and the love of a husband; however, she does not love her suitor and refuses to "wreck both [their] lives by marrying again without love on [her] side" (69).

4. Because most von Arnim scholarship focuses on *Elizabeth and her German Garden*'s place in the New Woman, Female Aesthete, and garden romance movements, the scholarship on *Vera* is sparse. The novel is occasionally mentioned in pieces using von Arnim to speak to a larger issue in women's literature from 1890 to 1940. Because *Vera* was inspired by von Arnim's

failed marriage to Lord Russell, scholars such as Nicola Beauman, Katie Roiphe, and Karen Osborne have used it as the armature to discuss aspects of von Arnim's life or her marriage. (For example, Roiphe uses the novel to claim, "The heroine in *Vera* is practically a child, a young, sheltered girl who knew no better than to get involved with him. This was not, of course, Elizabeth's situation, as a widow in her late forties with five children. But her choice of heroine may reveal a deeper truth of how she felt: innocent, in love" (130).) These sources seem to be more interested in what *Vera* reveals about von Arnim's marriage; indeed, very little scholarship focuses on close readings of *Vera*. The strongest example is Patsy Stoneman's "*Jane Eyre* between the Wars," which examines *Vera* alongside other modern novels featuring a second marriage in an effort to trace Gilbert and Gubar's angel/monster dichotomy through early twentieth century literature (most notably Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, which was published 17 years after *Vera*). Although scholars such as Hapgood, Bilston, and Shepherd have discussed the connection between identity and the garden in *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer*, there has been little done to understand how von Arnim's focus on the garden as a space of identity functions in her novels.

5. Hapgood has made parallels between the healing nature of the garden in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* and the gardens of garden romances of the 1890s written by Alfred Austin, Elizabeth von Arnim, Barbara Campbell, and others.

6. Building off of Julia Kristeva's theories of "abjection" and the "abject," scholars such as Patricia Riley and Anne E. Duggan have begun using the words "abjectification" and "abjectify" to describe the continual process of becoming "abject" at someone else's hand. This process applies to Lucy's "abjectification" in the wake of Everard's demands on her attention, her time, and her thoughts; thus, I use the somewhat uncommon term: "abjectification."

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