

INTEGRATING SHAKESPEAREAN BOTANICAL INTO A LANDSCAPE DESIGN CONCEPT

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the symbolic meanings of plants in Shakespeare's works and their application in landscape design. The most frequently mentioned species, such as the apple tree, rose, lily, and rosemary, were analyzed for their literary symbolism and incorporated into the design of a 150 m² private garden. The result demonstrates how literary symbolism can inspire aesthetic and conceptual coherence in contemporary garden design.

INTRODUCTION

Plants have served as inspiration and metaphors since ancient times. Their symbolism in literal works can inspire landscapers to create themed gardens, either using people's passion for particular writers, stories, or the symbolism of plants. Known for using plants as symbols in his works is William Shakespeare, Shakespearean botany being studied and published in several books, such as *Botanical Shakespeare - An Illustrated Compendium of All the Flowers, Fruits, Herbs, Trees, Seeds, and Grasses Cited by the World's Greatest Playwright* (Quealy et al., 2017).

For Shakespeare, as for many poets and playwrights of the era, *plant life* represented a particularly seductive expressive framework through which various human relationships could be explored, offering a flexible and refined language for examining questions of life (Feerick, 2009).

The aim of the paper was to analyse the symbolism of the most common plants in Shakespeare's plays and create a garden design with them.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In order to achieve the paper aim, Shakespeare's works were studied, noting the most common plants encountered and their symbolism in the context of the texts. Based on this information, the design of a 150 m² private garden was conceived, later realized in the program Realtime Landscaping Architect, a 3D design program specialized in landscaping and green space design.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

For a complex design of a private garden, but simple in essence, some of the most common plants in Shakespeare's works were noted: apple tree (*Malus domestica*), roses (*Rosa* spp.), rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), lily (*Lilium* spp.),

lily of the valley (*Convallaria majalis*), daisies (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), and fig tree (*Ficus carica*).

The garden focused on the use of two colors: red and white. Red, associated with the sun, flame, and blood, is a vibrant and dynamic color that inspires boldness, determination, and enthusiasm, but which, when used in excess, can generate tension and accelerate the heart rate (Ender et al., 2016), which is why it was mixed only with white and green in the design. White, a neutral color, is recommended for balancing the chromatic composition, providing a smooth transition between warm tones, such as red, and cool ones, such as green (Cantor et al., 2018). The design emphasizes the balance between warm and cool colors to evoke harmony and contrast.



Figure 1. View of the rose pergola and the relaxation area

Upon entering the garden, one is greeted by pergolas adorned with climbing red roses, which create a sheltered and tranquil space for relaxation (Figure 1). The rose plays a major role in Shakespeare's works, being mentioned in three-quarters of his plays (Kelley, 2005). It is a symbol of nobility and beauty in contrast to ugliness and corruption in *Henry IV*, a history play, or a symbol of true love, beyond appearances and conventions in *Romeo and Juliet*. In *Richard II* the rose symbolizes the decline of glory and power, while in *Hamlet* it symbolizes the loss of innocence and purity and in *Love's Labour's Lost* symbolizes idealized beauty and the perfection of love.

In the garden design, the rose brings accents of intense color and romance, while the apple tree offers structure and volume through its globular crown, contributing to both the aesthetic and utilitarian effect.

The apple tree is located at the center of the garden (Figure 2), featuring a globular crown, and also along the wall (Figure 3), where it is trained as a horizontal palmette, a decorative form that enhances the plant's aesthetic effect.



Figure 2. View of the apple tree in the centre of the garden

The apple is featured in *The Tempest*, Act II, Scene 1 as a banal symbol, reducing an island to a common object - something small and unimportant. In *Henry V*, Act III, Scene 7, the apple is used as an image of the weak and vulnerable body, symbolizing the fragility of life in war. The apple is also featured in plays like: *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, *Love's Labour's Lost* or *Taming of the Shrew* (Quealy et al., 2017), being one of the most popular fruit trees used in Shakespeare works.



Figure 3. View of the apple along the wall trained as a horizontal palmette

Both lilies and lilies of the valley (Figure 4) are used as a symbol of the purity and fragility of feminine youth. The image of the white lily suggests innocence, delicacy and untouched beauty. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act V, Scene 2, the lily becomes the emblem of feminine virtue, suggesting preserved honor and personal dignity and in *Henry VIII*, it symbolizes the fragility of life, even the tallest flower withers, evoking the character's tragic fate.



Figure 4. View of the fig (left side), lilies and rosemary (right side)

One of Shakespeare's most memorable references to plants appears in Ophelia's line from *Hamlet*, related to rosemary: "*There's rosemary, that's for remembrance*". Rosemary is one of the playwright's favored medicinal herbs, in the 17th century, rosemary was regarded as a versatile remedy believed to strengthen memory, alleviate anxiety and melancholy, relieve joint stiffness, and counteract poisons (Kelley, 2005). Rosemary also appears in *Romeo and Juliet* play, either as a funerary plant, a symbol of memory and mourning, but also as a play on words between "Romeo" and "rosemary", being an association between love and memory.

The lily and the lily of the valley add delicacy and brightness to the landscape, while the rosemary contributes with its silver-green foliage and its subtle fragrance that stimulates the senses, adding more sensory elements to the garden, while the daisy suggests a note of naturalness and rustic simplicity, and the fig tree with its ample foliage and Mediterranean appearance, adds depth and an exotic touch to the composition.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the fig tree symbolizes abundance, fertility, and the joy of simple living, while in *Antony and Cleopatra* becomes the symbol of life mixed with death, it signifies sensuality, temptation, but also the inevitable end.

When selecting species for the garden composition, its natural rhythm of development and the seasonal succession of flowering and fruiting periods were also taken into account, in order to maintain visual interest throughout the year. *Malus domestica* blooms in spring (Goeckeritz et al., 2023), in April - May, when white-pink flowers decorate the crown before the fruits appear, which gradually ripen until September - October. The rose begins flowering in early summer, in June, and continues successively until late autumn, while the lily opens its flowers in June - August, providing a vertical and elegant touch to the garden. *Convallaria majalis* blooms in early spring, in April - May, covering the ground with small, white, fragrant flowers. *Rosmarinus officinalis* has an early flowering period, from March to May (Garcia-Fayos et al., 2018), when it produces blue-violet flowers, while *Leucanthemum vulgare* has an abundant flowering in the months of June - August, and *Ficus carica* brings an exotic accent to the landscape composition between the months of July and September (Marcotuli et al., 2020).

The choice of these plants has not only a decorative value, but also a conceptual one, as it renders, through the language of vegetation, fundamental ideas from the Shakespearean universe, such as: the contrast between passion and reason, the ephemerality of life, purity and rebirth. Thus, the garden becomes not only an aesthetic space, but also a symbolic one, capable of visually transposing the complexity and depth of Shakespearean literary themes.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of plant symbolism in the works of William Shakespeare highlighted the depth with which plants were used as means of expression for universal themes such as life, love, fragility, purity or ephemerality. The study demonstrated that these meanings can be reinterpreted in a contemporary context, through landscape design, giving the garden not only aesthetic value, but also cultural and emotional significance.

Thus, the garden becomes a spatial expression of the Shakespearean universe, a place where aesthetics intertwines with symbolic meaning, and plants become carriers of cultural meanings. The work highlights the interdisciplinary potential of the connection between literature and landscape architecture, demonstrating that plant design can transmit emotion, memory, and cultural identity.

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