

CREATING NIRVANA: THE RENAISSANCE GARDENS OF EARLY

MODERN ENGLAND

A CREATIVE PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN

PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

BY

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I worked with Dr. Tara Wood to solidify my creative project topic, The Renaissance Gardens of Early Modern England. During the summer of 2018, I completed an independent study with Dr. Wood centered around building an understanding of the topic. During this course I became familiar with several secondary and primary sources on the subject. The work of historian Roy Strong and his analysis of the renaissance gardens of England and the cultural impact that these spaces held within Early Modern society served as the inspiration and basis for this project. It was important to place English garden history into a larger historical context, recognizing their importance in understanding early modern culture and social values represented in landscape.

After defining and refining my topic of interest I began the process of creating digital applications to present the topic's information. I came to this topic convinced that it was an important topic to explore historically and would benefit greatly from my previous studies in the fine arts, giving me an advantage in understanding in the visual design elements of these spaces. This topic also fit well with a previous digital project I completed in HIST 631, in which I analyzed the material culture of late medieval queens and their households, arguing that their material wealth was a unique reflection of their own personal wealth and status. My thesis for this current project is very similar, arguing that the Renaissance gardens of early modern England were a reflection of the society in which they were created. These spaces embodied the most prominent social values: control of self and surroundings, and displays of wealth and status.

Writing the content was the first step and a continually changing aspect of this project. To organize the abundance of information gleaned from the summer course prior, I began the process of making a story map. To complete this digital application, I worked closely with Angie Gibson the Geographic Information Systems Specialist at Ball State University. Together we built a spatial story about the renaissance gardens of early modern England. Angie showed me how to take the information I had gathered and translate it into a cohesive component of my project. The incorporation of a GIS story map into my project provides the perfect outlet of the spatial information that is interactive. The benefit of presenting special information in this format is the ability to physical see what would otherwise be visualized in the mind's eye. It can be argued that the use of GIS story mapping allows for a more complete understanding of spatial information.

The construction of this story map took place over course of several months. It was a process of trial and error, working to find the best way to display the information at hand. Starting with the plotting of the spatial coordinates of seventeen gardens throughout England, the number of points grew to thirty-one as the application and research developed. After the points were marked on the map, Angie, Dr. Seefeldt, and myself looked at the research I had gathered and discussed the best way to present said information. After discussion and more trial- and- error, an overlay of a historical map, dated 1706, was embedded into the story map. In addition to this map, Angie and I added a *Spyglass* application. The addition of the spyglass application allows users to compare and contrast the existence of the Renaissance gardens in England with the wave of the curser.

To expand the information that can be gleaned from the GIS Story Map, I added a search application. This application allows the user to seek out and sort the plotted gardens by the style trend the gardens fall under, it also sorts by dates. In addition to this search application, a timeline application was added. The timeline functioned as a timelapse, color coding and highlighting the gardens as it passed its time of creation. After these applications were added, tested, and perfected as parts of the larger story map, I shifted my attention to text analysis.

The use of Voyant Tools allows for the analytical understanding of several source simultaneously, pulling major themes from the text. For the textual analysis portion of my creative project I used three primary sources, all hand written. For the Voyant application to work effectively all three of these sources needed to be transcribed into digital, text files. This required the careful reading and accurate transcription of each source resulting in over two hundred pages of text. “Data cleanup” ensures that the Voyant results produced are the most effective. After the transcription stage the corpus is uploaded to Voyant and analyzed. Voyant offers several options in regards to the types of tools one can use to analyze a body of text, allowing researchers to see a variety of visualization before deciding which tool displays the text in the most impactful way. Prior to my creative project I had used *Voyant Tools* in a class with Dr. Douglas Seefeldt, a year previous. In need of a refresher, I sat in on this class, last spring helping me to remember the application and discover new additions.

After the completion of the Story Map and the *Voyant Tool* applications, I started the process of putting together the final product, as a website. First, I used a website template archive to choose an HTML/CSS design web format that had functions that would work best for my project, being sure that it displayed and communicated the topic information in the most effective way possible. After choosing the best fit for my project, there was still a considerable

amount of formatting changes that needed to be made. In addition to embedding all the interactive components, Stoy Map and *Voyant*, I added a visual analysis section to my project. This addition required me to build a photo gallery exhibit using, an application called Exhibit that presents and sorts images according to themes. These themes are specified by the creator, the purpose of this application is to allow users to make analytical connections within numerous visual sources. The coding language of this application is JavaScript, a very complex language. It is easy to produce an error message with a seemingly minor error. For example, it took Dr. Seefeldt and I the better part of an hour to figure out an issue with this application finally discovering it was a missing semicolon.

This application proved to be problematic to the bitter end. After the application finally showed up on the web page it was a jumbled mess of pictures and text. The solution was to crop all of the seventy pictures individually to fix the 200 X 150 pixel dimensions suited for the application. With that change came more issues, the images would not show up in their new size resulting in three hours of trial and error and research. After the problem was resolved I faced my final issue with this application, clicking the full size image once the thumb is selected. This portion of the project was the most problematic and time consuming of all the other components. The final challenge in completing this application was the task of linking the cropped thumbnails to the full image that it represents. First, the URL link for each image must be identified then added to the lines of JavaScript code used to build the gallery. The images selected to build this exhibit were chosen to provide an accurate, detailed visual idea of the gardens of early modern England in their original splendor. This complete picture includes images of the garden's original influences from Italy and France. Included are images of the flowers and foliage found within these spaces,

important to complete the imagination. Lastly, no visual representation could not be completed without the presents of artistic interpretation in the form of paintings, prints and textile arts.

Although the visual analysis section of this project proved to one of the most challenging, this project consists of six complete pages: a home or navigation page, an introduction page, visual analysis, spatial analysis, textual analysis, a source page and an about page. Each of these pages have their own indivial tab, with links to navigate to other aspects of the project. To code these actions into my project it took several episodes of trial and error to produce the correct results. The final additions to this project included the added functions of linking images and text to other tabs in the project. For example, the four circler images on the home page of this project is linked to the different pages that it introduces. The “read more” button toward the top of the home page links the reader to the introduction page for more information, in addition every parenthetical reference is linked to the source page. The “get in touch” button at the bottom of each page opens an email in a separate tab so that is easy for users with more questions to contact me.

The process of making this creative project was full of hard-earned victories and failures that turned into important lessons. I relearned skills I had been introduced to in past classes, including HTML and CSS coding languages and the story map application. This project is the marriage of old and new skills.