

**GARDENS AS “PARTNERS” IN CONTEMPLATION:
READING THE STORIES OF THE FIRST EDEN (GENESIS 2–3)
AND A RESTORED EDEN (SONG OF SONGS) THROUGH THE
LENS OF ATTENTION RESTORATION THEORY**

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ABSTRACT

It is well known that gardens have always been inspiring for great thinkers of the past, for instance Greek and Roman philosophers, Confucian thinkers, Desiderius Erasmus, Isaac Newton and Arnold Toynbee, to name but a few. Why is this so? Attention Restoration Theory, developed by environmental psychologists Stephen and Rachel Kaplan, explains how both wild (e.g., reserves) and cultivated nature (e.g., parks, gardens) can assist in replenishing our cognitive and emotional coping capacities, and uplift us. Nature is not only a setting but an active agent/“partner” in sustaining human well-being, inter alia when contemplating or reflecting on the meaning of life. In order to achieve this the human/nature relationship needs to meet the properties of “being away”, “compatibility”, “soft fascination” and “extent”. Shining the light of these insights on two “Edens” in the Old Testament, the one lost (Gen 2–3) and the other revived (Song of Songs), nature’s role in evoking contemplation especially, whether on human fate or human delight, will be highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

In the Museum of Origins at the University of the Witwatersrand there is a beautiful exhibition of San people who roamed the country in prehistoric times. In one hall there is a magnificent stuffed eland with his head down, front legs crossed and almost in a kneeling position in the process of dying. The taxidermist did a fine job, even capturing the look of death in this huge animal’s wide-open eyes, as life drains from him after being shot with a poisoned arrow by a San hunter. Close by there is an

explanation of a hunter who was seen holding the tail of such a dying eland. When asked why, he explained that the eland is “good to think by!” With this insightful remark he acknowledged that the eland is far more than much needed protein to survive but also a link to the “other world”. This hunter intuitively sensed that nature is good to think by, an inspiring medium through which to contemplate and reflect. And this is what this contribution is all about, nature — in this focus, gardens — as a very useful “agent” to let the mind wander.

The intuitive use of nature to reflect and contemplate has been done by humans throughout history, long before science provided the theory (-ies) of its positive effects on human well-being. One way of describing the restorative and inspiring effect of nature comes from environmental psychology and specifically Attention Restoration Theory (ART). Insights from ART were applied by Thielen and Diller (s.a.), who delved into history to show how gardens of old were crucial for learning, reflection and enlightenment. They show that great thinkers such as the Greek and Roman philosophers Plato, Epicurus, Cicero and Plinius the Younger, ten to twelfth century Confucian thinkers at the Yuelu Academy, and more modern names from the English world like Desiderius Erasmus, Sir Isaac Newton and Arnold Toynbee all had a deep appreciation for nature as good to think by. Their academies, schools, monasteries, libraries and laboratories were all adjacent to inspiring gardens where they often wandered and became inspired. Pliny the Younger for instance enjoyed going out to a covered portico to contemplate on a subject that he was currently engaged in. Similar was the experience of Zhu Xi, one of the leaders of the Yuelu Academy, who walked the surrounding landscape of the academy to ponder and understand his colleague Zhang Shi’s complex ideas. It is said that Isaac Newton, whose laboratory at Trinity College Cambridge opened into a garden where he enjoyed walking, often rushed back indoors to write down a new insight without allowing himself to sit down. What is it about nature that has this rewarding effect on the human mind?

In what follows I shall first describe ART, its development by environmental psychologists Stephen and Rachel Kaplan (1989) and notably its required properties for the human/nature relationship to be healing and inspiring. I shall then apply its

insights to two “gardens” of old, namely the first Eden (Gen 2–3) and a later Eden (Song of Songs).¹ In order to achieve this I build on the insights of Norman Habel’s ecological hermeneutics where the Earth is seen as a living “subject” rather than mere matter only there for the sake of humans (Habel 2011:1–16). Commentators are unanimous that the paradise lost in Genesis is regained in the Song but with differences. The Song’s Eden is much lusher than the first one, gender enmity has been replaced by equality and mutuality and even the traditional “lower” species, the plants and animals, are embraced as kin and valued for their own sake (Fox 1985:285 following Gerleman).

ATTENTION RESTORATION THEORY

We have all had the experience of becoming mentally exhausted after a prolonged period of concentration. We intuitively know that we need a “break” from what we are doing and need to divert our attention. If we do not then we become prone to human error, become irritable and impatient and often make impulsive decisions. Being in this state can even lead to aggression and antisocial behaviour (de Young 2010:16). How can we rectify this? Sleep, an intake of glucose or a meditative activity can restore the attentional focus of the mind (Berman et al. 2008:1211; Kaplan & Berman 2010:52–53; Kaplan 2001). One can add that listening to music, a visit to the theatre or art museum can have a similar positive effect on resting the mind and restoring its functionality. Or we can expose ourselves to our natural surrounds to become refreshed. It is especially the latter that receives the emphasis in ART. ART provides a psychological-theoretical explanation of why and how the mind can become restored, notably through exposure to nature. But why is nature so special and do all or only certain kinds of nature have this remedying effect?

Our evolutionary history sheds some light on humans’ spontaneous attraction to nature. As a prelude to developing ART, Stephen and Rachel Kaplan describe

¹ Although the Song of Songs is often fondly described as such, there are more Edens in the Bible; see also a forthcoming contribution for a more comprehensive treatment of Attention Restoration Theory as well as its application to the Song (Viviers 2016).

humans' natural, intuitive preference for certain natural areas (1989:1–116). Humans globally prefer environs that are parklike, wood-lawn or savanna that signal accessibility and free movement and therefore also safety (1989:48, 115). This aptly reflects the exchange of the thick forests for the more open savanna by our early hominid ancestors. Our preferences have also been shaped in modern times to opt for a balance between human influence and nature (1989:29, 31). A densely built area in an inner city is less attractive and appealing than a suburb where at least something of nature (such as a park) has been set aside. The presence of water and the colours green and blue also enhance humans' intuitive preferences (1989:9) although some of these assumptions need more research (Michaelis 2011). The fact that we are fully part of nature explains our seamless “fit” into it. It constantly fascinates us and this enhances our overall well-being. It is especially the notion of “fascination” coined by one of the pioneers of modern psychology, William James (1842–1910), which informed the Kaplans in developing their theory. James made a distinction between two mental mechanisms, namely voluntary attention and involuntary attention (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989:179; Kaplan 1995:172). Voluntary attention requires thoughtful focus and effort. Involuntary attention or “fascination,” however, comes effortlessly, for instance when one becomes excited and fascinated by attention-grabbing things that are peculiar, comely, moving, colourful/bright and so on. To avoid terminological confusion and recap its functionality, the Kaplans called James' voluntary attention “directed attention”. This mental mechanism is prone to fatigue and therefore not an unlimited resource (Kaplan & Berman 2010:43). It is in constant need of being rested to become restored. Both these mechanisms probably had adaptive value for early humans but with a switch of roles today. In earlier times, being continually “fascinated” and alert to one's surroundings could save one's life. Kaplan and Berman explain: “Just as wild ungulates cheerfully consuming a patch of delicious foliage [directed attention — HV] look up intermittently (reducing the likelihood that anyone could sneak up on them) [involuntary attention — HV], being too preoccupied to scan for potential hazards would also have been dangerous for our ancestors” (2010:45). Nowadays it is our directed attention that ensures our survival as we labour to earn a living. It helps us to

focus as we conduct our daily, important duties without being preoccupied by that which is attention-grabbing (Kaplan & Berman 2010:48). Directed attention helps us to become good executives in emotional control of ourselves, or to function effectively (2010:44). For the directed attention mechanism to replenish itself, it needs the assistance of the involuntary attention mechanism or “fascination”. The latter shields the former against the bombardment of stimuli by redirecting the focus of the mind to become absorbed in interesting stimuli. Appealing sunsets, interesting cloud formations, attractive water features, the green sprouting of plants, blooming of flowers, singing of birds, movement of animals and so on, hold the attention of the mind without exerting it. Exposure to nature in this way is aptly described by some as similar to receiving a “dose” of good medicine (Taylor & Kuo 2009:402). Becoming “one” with one’s surroundings happens spontaneously and without effort. Furthermore, it allows the mind to readily wander (Kaplan 2001:511) and it enhances reflection. Whilst experiencing this, the directed attention can come to rest.² It is important, however, to distinguish between “soft fascination” just described, and “hard fascination”. Even though exposed to nature, observing of the killing of cubs by a nomad lion taking over another’s pride is obviously not relaxing; or watching a tense sporting match on television will, contrary to its intention, not rest the directed attention mechanism but instead further fatigue it (Kaplan & Berman 2010:49). But is “soft fascination” in nature enough to replenish the mind, or is more required for the human/nature relationship to ensure restored attention?

When we think of natural retreats we tend to picture nature in its wild, exotic and pristine appearance. Nature, even in its fullness, need not be distant but surrounds us every day, since it can be as close as one’s suburban garden or park, and therefore referred to as “nearby nature” (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989:15–174). In this article authentic nature, whether far or near, meets the following requirements: being away, compatibility, soft fascination and extent. These properties intersect and complement each other to effect restoration. Being away or “getting away from it all” implies both

² From neuroscience it has become clear that the two attentional mechanisms also have different neural locations/functions, explaining why they can operate in alternate fashion (Kaplan & Berman 2010:47-48).

a physical and psychological distance from one's familiar working environment. To be in "another world" implies the awareness of "cognitive content different from the usual" (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989:189). There is a difference of opinion whether virtual nature (e.g., nature films, murals of natural scenes) compared to "real" nature can have the same positive effect on people (Mayer et al. 2009). De Kort et al. (2006), however, are convinced of the worth also of virtual nature in so far as it represents an authentic replication of the real thing. Compatibility refers to fitting into nature in order to fulfil a specific purpose/need or address a human inclination (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989:185). Our interconnectedness with nature — where we come from, where we have been shaped over many years into the beings we are and therefore also where we belong — creates a natural fit or "special resonance" between people and the natural environment (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989:193). Soft fascination, or the effortless "undramatic" (Kaplan 1995:174) seizing by inspiring natural scenes has been indicated above. It is especially fascination that facilitates the wandering of the mind, and often translates into a spiritual consciousness of wonderment and awe, of being connected to some greater unseen reality (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989:195, 197). Much more research needs to be done on the length and quality of time spent in nature before it has a meaningful and lasting effect but a mere twenty minutes seemed to be sufficient for children with attention deficit disorder (Taylor & Kuo 2009:402, 407; De Young 2010:21). Extent implies order, structure, coherence or interrelatedness of different components of a natural setting. It signals safety, free movement and aids memory in finding one's way (Kaplan 2001:3–5; de Young 2001:18). Extent also implies a rich and interesting content or scope luring the mind that there is more to explore and discover than a first glance impression. An interesting, cleverly designed garden has this effect: "Certainly, many gardeners feel a relationship to a force or system that is larger than they are and that is not under human control" (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989:191). This quality's evocation of a connectedness also to something conceptually larger, "another world", seemingly works in tandem with the previous ones. The "agency" of nature to achieve this, to enhance reflection and contemplation (good to think by) is of special interest for this contribution.

Having admitted that there are other ways of restoring mental attentional capacity, the use of nature in doing this is quite attractive. It is effortless, it is accessible to all and almost on our doorstep and its healing and contemplative benefits come free. It is time to focus on the first and later Eden, analyse their appreciation of nature’s “agency” and determine if they (unknowingly) meet the requirements of ART.

THE FIRST EDEN (GENESIS 2–3)

The second and older creation narrative in the Hebrew Bible, Genesis 2:4b–3:24 by the “Yahwist”,³ is quite distinct from its younger Priestly predecessor, Genesis 1. Instead of the meticulous and neat structuring of the first, the second is presented as rather ordinary but nevertheless attractive storytelling⁴ and acknowledged even by an old commentary as a closely articulated narrative contemplating on humans’ loss of innocence in Eden and being expelled from it (Skinner 1930:51). Although this seemingly naive story has a complicated history of growth towards its final form, as it now stands it captures the imagination as a persuasive narrative (von Rad 1972:75).⁵ Habel (2011:19–20) aptly describes it as an origin myth; natural time and space and natural laws⁶ do not fully apply to these kinds of stories. It is usually also characterised by a vital absence that needs to be addressed, for instance a “server” for

³ Even though Newsom (2000:62), in line with older studies, still refers to the “author” in this traditional way, Becking (2011:3) has indicated that this has become dated: “The classic four-sources hypothesis on the emergence of the Pentateuch has been challenged in the last 35 years. It is interesting to note that P, as an exilic or post-exilic redactor, has survived this challenge, but that J as a tenth-century BCE author has disappeared from the scene. Some scholars have buried him altogether, while others have exiled J to the Babylonian period.” Habel (2011:17, 18) admits that the search for literary sources was fashionable about 40 years ago but now instead focuses on possible “green” ideologies and values embedded in the text; the “what” that is written, is more important than the “who” or “when”.

⁴ Newsom (2000:63) describes this narrative as characterised by “a graphic sense of ‘earthiness’”.

⁵ It seems, however, isolated in the OT with no prophet, psalm or narrator explicitly referring to it (von Rad 1972:102), but the NT reading it as the “Fall”. In regard to the last-mentioned Becking (2011:2-3) refers to especially the Pauline texts and the apocalyptic work 4 Ezra as examples.

⁶ E.g., the “geography” of Eden, the “talking” snake and miraculous trees.

the garden/park. It nevertheless emphasises a strong interconnection between humans and nature. Genesis 2:4b–3:24 also resembles a catastrophe myth where the origin of a certain condition or current state of affairs is reflected upon, for instance the attraction of the sexes, enmity between humans and snakes, women’s painful and difficult childbirths, the burden of daily toil and so on. Newsom (2000:72) therefore speaks of this kind of narration as a theodicy and von Rad (1972:92) of stories of an aetiological kind.

Habel (2011:46–49, 64), reading the creation narrative from the perspective of *Adamah*, fertile soil or “mother ground,” as a fully-fledged character/subject in her own right and not traditionally as the “Fall”, has quite a different structure of plot development than for instance the older anthropocentrically/theocentrically focused commentaries:⁷ narrative setting (primal context, 2:4b–6), scene one (primal creative acts with *Adamah*, 2:7–15), scene two (primal relationships established, 2:16–25), scene 3 (primal enlightenment, 3:1–7), scene 4 (primal consequences of the enlightenment, 3:17–19), scene five (primal acts of closure, 3:20–24). But on what grounds and important for this contribution can Habel (2011:51) say “*Adamah* is a co-agent with Yahweh Elohim in the formation of both humans and forests; *Adamah* is God’s partner in the creation of all life on Earth”?⁸ An earlier commentary has noticed

⁷ For example, Wenham (1987:50) centring the climax on the “Fall”, 3:6-8, within his overall ABCDC'B'A' pattern; see also Boomershire to whom Habel (2011:46) specifically refers.

⁸ The role of non-human characters in the biblical text has been neglected or overlooked in the past and therefore their “agency” comes across as somewhat foreign. Habel (2011:18) says the following in this regard: “Integral to my reading of the text will be an orientation of empathy and concern for Earth as such, for domains of Earth such [as] *Erets* or *Adamah* and for members of the Earth community such as the snake. The task is to ascertain what role the characters play as subjects in the plot and in the meaning of the narrative — whether or not that role is made explicit by the narrator. By identifying with these non-human characters or domains in the narrative, we read the text with new eyes and can often discern dimensions that may otherwise be overlooked”; and furthermore: “While a detailed knowledge of the biblical Hebrew and the ancient Near Eastern context is assumed, we will not necessarily debate the original form of each grammatical expression. The focus will be on the language of the narrative and the meaning expressed, implied or hidden in that language when reading from the perspective of Earth and employing an ecological hermeneutic of suspicion, identification and retrieval.” Habel does this consistently when highlighting *Adamah* as “a major character in the story,” as “a pivotal subject in the plot of the myth,” as “mother ground” and as “God’s partner in the creation of all life on Earth” (2011:46, 48, 49, 51).

the agency of *Adamah* by referring to her “medewerking” (cooperation) with the creator (van Selms 1973:74). Although her agency is hidden between the lines unlike that of the other characters, Adam, Eve, the snake and God, the “cooperation” of *Adamah* comes aptly to the fore in the *hiph ‘il* of *wayyašmah* in 2:9 (“And he let sprout from the earth...”) where the subject (Yahweh) and object (*Adamah*) of the verb are acting jointly (Wurst 2000:90, following Welker).⁹ When *Adamah* is addressed as an innocent bystander to receive the curse in Genesis 3:17 she is “identified as a subject whose voice deserves to be heard” (Habel 2011:62). Furthermore, in order to retrieve the silenced¹⁰ voice of mother-earth, the “ground of our being” (Wurst 2000:103, citing Suzuki & McConnell), Wurst (2000:102) creatively pictures the mother-“goddess,” Earth, as welcoming back the cursed human in death (3:19 “from dust you are and to dust shall you return”). The earth acts like a loving mother welcoming her child back, despite and ironically being innocently punished for having done nothing wrong, almost Christ-like (Wurst 2000:103). She instead co-worked with Yahweh and now has to take the blame of the curse which she does not deserve (see also Habel 2011:66)! How does the agent *Adamah* embody the properties of being away, compatibility, fascination and extent? What has she to offer in this regard? In what follows the narrative will be systematically scrutinised from the perspectives of each of these properties and only those exegetical insights that pertain to a specific property will be highlighted.

Being away means getting away from it all, that is, from our daily toil to rest the mind. Part of this process is to be exposed to new cognitive content. One can form an appropriate impression of being away in *Adamah* by comparing the human couple’s life before and after the expulsion. The latter is the typical kind of real life that taps the directed attention mechanism leading to cognitive depletion, a life of stressful and

⁹ See also Gen 1:11–12.

¹⁰ Wurst (2000:95, 101, following Westbrook) argues that in indigenous Canaanite religions the earth was viewed as a mother-goddess, a powerful symbol that could not be “tolerated in the new regime of Yahwistic monotheism”. The same applies to the snake that was closely associated with the goddess and who apart from skin shedding that symbolised eternal life, also controlled both the upper ground and underground where it lived.

tarnished relations with animals,¹¹ each other and markedly with *Adamah* to survive through daily toil. The “before” in their only known “home” was exactly the opposite. It was a rich, interesting and adventurous discovery of increasingly new experiences, almost like the innocent life journey of a child resonating spontaneously with nature (Skinner 1930:68). The green forest caught the attention, as it has always done reflecting the life force (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989:9), notably in the arid ancient Near East where the evergreens indicate this connection to the source of life (Wenham 1987:62). And similarly the abundance of water (vv. 10–14) that ensured both early human survival (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989:9), as well as the basic requirement for civilised life (von Rad 1972:80). The garden/park also links with the far-away, mysterious land of Havilah with its prized gold and minerals. The adventure of discovery continues with the exposure to and naming of all the wild and domesticated animals and birds. Naming here simply implies recognition or ordering and not controlling (Newsom 2000:66; von Rad 1972:83), indicating harmony despite the non-human animals not being a perfect match for Adam. And the tension built up by the skilful narrator becomes resolved when man meets his perfect match, woman. Once more life’s horizons become widened here in and with *Adamah*, when her co-creations with Yahweh discover the attraction of sex before the so-called “Fall” (Newsom 2000:68). Their nakedness here implies innocence, similar to that of the animals (Newsom 2000:68; Skinner 1930:72). After the transgression it reflects self-consciousness, the human/animal difference (Newsom 2000:67–69) and the divide that occurred. And in between is the encounter with one of *Adamah*’s fascinating creatures, the wise and discerning snake. Skinner (1930:72) points out how easily a snake can become “more” than natural through its abilities of agile moving (without feet), its hypnotic effect on other animals and the shedding of its skin. The garden and her inhabitants border on the miraculous, including the fearful cherubim with their flashing swords, guarding the entrance to Eden, after the expulsion. Being away in *Adamah* indeed captures the mind! Quite interesting in the narrative is that even the

¹¹ Newsom (2000:71) articulately states that before humans named them, now they wear them!

character God appreciates “being away” by “walking”:¹² “Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day ...” (3:8). After discovering the humans’ transgression God has to reflect, judge¹³ and give his verdict right there on the spot.

Compatibility has to do with our purposeful relation to nature, what we intend doing there and how we “fit” our natural surrounds. The Kaplans (1989:193) make it clear how easily humans adapt in nature even though the majority of humans are urbanites nowadays. We feel at home in nature because we are part and parcel of nature. This interconnectedness comes expressively to the fore with the acknowledgement of *’ādām* being formed from *’ādāmā* (2:6) with the conspicuous wordplay/pun noted in most commentaries. Yahweh in potter-like fashion forms the first human from the dust of *Adamah*. Newsom (2000:65) speaks eloquently of humans and *Adamah* sharing “common ground” and Wurst (2000:92) in the same vein of “human from the humus”, acknowledging our deeply shared kinship with the ground. Becking (2011:8) adds: “With every fibre the human is connected to the soil.” Even Eve, formed from Adam’s rib is “grounded” logically in *Adamah* — if he comes from there and she from him, then she is also a groundling (Habel 2011:56). And the animals are made similarly from *Adamah* (2:19) emphasising an interconnectedness, despite Yahweh not breathing air/atmosphere (*nišmat*, v. 7) into them as into Adam. They live from the same godly atmosphere (Habel 2011:56) as humans do and are not inferior (Newsom 2000:66; Habel 2011:51). Apart from belonging to the dust of *Adamah* (2:19), the appreciation of water also points to an intuitive acknowledgement of humans being made up (70%) of this substance. But what did humans have to do specifically in Eden, for what purpose were they put there? Most commentators agree that 2:15 captures their mission here on earth, to serve (*’bd*) and preserve (*šmr*)

¹² Walking in nature is probably the primary (and easiest) way of replenishing our cognitive capabilities; see especially De Young (2010) appreciating this simple but very effective, beneficial act. God is seen here by some as a “forest ranger” (Habel 2011:60), by others as a royal owner (“bezzitter”) enjoying his private garden (“hof”) (van Selms 1973:56, 68).

¹³ Wurst (2000:88) argues that death following the “eating” should be regarded as the outcome of a court case and not the natural death of humans. Van Selms (1973:57) argues in similar vein that “*mōt tāmūt* is een aanduiding van een juridisch vonnis ... niet van een natuurlijk gevolg.”

Adamah. This is so completely the opposite of Genesis 1:26–28 where they were instructed to rule (*rdh*) and subdue (*kbš*) the earth (Habel 2011:53). They had to work out a life for themselves in and with *Adamah*.¹⁴ It is also clear that this is no leisurely “happy valley” or “an Elysium for sensual enjoyment” (von Rad 1972:80) but a place to pleasantly labour (Skinner 1930:66). Contrary to van Selms (1973:46) who regarded the author of Genesis 2–3 as an agriculturalist (“boer”), and envisaging the future vocation of the first human pair as farmers, Newsom (2000:65, 70) sees agriculture as one of the fateful consequences after God’s curse. She, however, does allow for a form of permaculture or being an “orchardist” (Wurst 2000:91 fn. 9).¹⁵ Compatibility to their surrounds continues even after the transgression but now with hardship. Even God acknowledges this new turn of events by clothing and preparing them (3:21) for their life of “new consciousness” (Habel 2000:63). And *Adamah* will still provide, now “field crops” apart from pioneer vegetation, thistles and thorns (Habel 2011:62).

Fascination of the human involuntary attention mechanism through nature has been touched on already. Being exposed to (being away) and finding your place (compatibility) in pristine *Adamah* cannot but spontaneously capture the mind. The narrator markedly contributes to this picture of the experience of fascination. The aesthetic and survival value of water has been pointed out by the Kaplans (1989:9). The abundance of water through the surfacing of a fountain (*’ēd*, 2:6), along with the main river separating into four (vv. 10–14), is conspicuous (van Selms 1973:53; Newsom 2000:63). The four rivers might subtly point to overall availability or completeness (Wenham 1987:65). Likewise the colour green portraying “life” through *Adamah*’s abundance of trees, both pleasing to look at (*neḥmād lēmar’eh*) and good to eat (*wēṭōb lēma’ākāl*), along with the two miraculous trees in the centre, the “tree of life” and the “tree of knowledge of good and bad” (v. 9 — see discussion of extent below). The further creation of the rich diversity of animals as “helper”¹⁶ for Adam

¹⁴ Very suitably described by Wurst (2000:91) as a “reciprocal custodianship”.

¹⁵ This park/garden resembles a fine balance between far away (wild) and nearby (tamed) nature satisfying humans’ intuitive preferences (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989:29, 31).

¹⁶ *’ēzer* should not be understood here as an inferior term but rather as a complementing “partner”; even God is sometimes referred to by this term (Exod 18:4; Deut 33:7; Ps 70:5;

and his subsequent naming to know them, implies an astounding experience, despite not finding his match. When he does find his matching *‘ezer*, his reaction is astounding. Wenham (1987:70) captures the narrator’s poetic skills as follows: “In these five short lines many of the standard techniques of Hebrew poetry are employed: parallelism (lines 2–3; 4–5), assonance and word play (woman/man); chiasmus (ABC/C’B’A’) (lines 4–5, ‘this...called woman’//‘man...taken this’); and verbal repetition: by opening the tricolon and bicolon with ‘this’ and then by concluding with the same word the man’s exclamation concentrates all eyes on this woman.” Even the snake fascinates by being specifically called *‘ārūm* (wise, prudent, astute, clever; see Prov 14:15), and the narrator through wordplay, also subtly linking 3:1 with 2:25 (*‘ārūmmīm*). The snake, not the “serpent”,¹⁷ should not be regarded as evil (Habel 2011:57; Newsom 2000:67) and only does what he is designed to do, namely being clever. In comparison to the ignorant humans he seemingly knew what the gods knew (Habel 2011:57) and all that he predicted came true. With the transgression of the woman we once again see the skilful narrator at work, presenting verse 6 as a *Steigerung*, captivated by the “fascination of sense” (Skinner 1930:75): she “saw” the good-to-eat-from and desirable tree of knowledge, she “took” its fruit and “she ate”! And as mentioned before, even the frightful cherubim guarding the entrance to *Adamah*, unmistakably catches the attention. It has become clear that the fascination of *Adamah* (along with the other properties) has led to something more than mere enjoyment but a journey into another world, that of lost innocence or self-consciousness. *Adamah* along with other role players has been an active agent in this discovery.

The property of extent, according to the Kaplans, implies two things, namely an ordered/structured natural site that resembles a fine balance between pristine nature

Habel 2011:54).

¹⁷ “There is no aetiology of the origin of evil” (von Rad 1972:87 following Westermann). “Serpent” is the typical terminology of the later “Fall” interpretations of Genesis 2-3. Habel (2011:57) says: “It is preferable to name the snake a ‘snake’ and not imply sinister dimensions by using the alternative translation of ‘serpent.’ The snake, like all the other animals, is an Earth being — born of the *Adamah* ... Eden is not the domain of an alien character ...”

and human intervention as well as a space that is rich, interesting and mysterious, allowing the mind to wander. The narrator of Genesis 2–3 intuitively grasps the notion of order and unknowingly acknowledges the universal human need for orderliness. This garden/park, even though it is mythical and therefore disqualifies the search for a “real” geography,¹⁸ nevertheless has a few ordering spatial pointers. It is not only planted by God himself in the East (*miqqedem*, 2:8), but the latter reference to where the sun rises and its association with light validates a godly life-giving presence even further (Wenham 1987:61). The two miraculous trees are situated in the centre of the garden (2:9). Habel (2011:52; also von Rad 1972:79) suggests that the origin of the main river (2:10) is indicative of some high point in this garden. It is implied that the first human couple can move about freely and safely in the garden and the late afternoon walk of God (3:8) indicates accessible pathways. East (*miqqedem*) appears again as a spatial pointer towards the end of the narrative indicating Eden’s entrance (3:24). The rich, interesting and attention-grabbing qualities of *Adamah* have been touched upon already. Its mysterious quality comes aptly to the fore through (inter alia) its abundance of water (2:6, 10–14), the miraculous trees (2:9) and the enigmatic figure of the snake (3:1). The waters symbolically evoke an otherworldly divine association (e.g. Ps 36:8–9; Ezek 47). It has been indicated how the resilience of an ordinary tree in an arid country easily leads to it being admired and intuitively linked to the life-force (god) of “another world”.¹⁹ The latter is aptly affirmed by a remark of Rachel Kaplan of a natural view through a window that “can quickly transport one elsewhere ... to distant places and thoughts” (2001:511). This applies even more so to the two miraculous trees, the tree of life aptly called the “god-tree” by Habel (2011:63) to indicate immortality and the tree of knowledge of good and bad. The latter does not indicate “evil” but merely comprehensive knowledge (“*alomvattende kennis*”, van Selms 1973:52), the experiencing of both sides of an issue (Habel 2011:54), or the ability to discriminate and make choices (Newsom 2011:67). *Adamah*’s agency is extended aptly through her offspring, these trees that transport

¹⁸ Skinner’s (1930:62) description of it as a “semi-mythical geography” is succinct.

¹⁹ Wenham (1987:87) remarks pithily: “... these are symbols of God’s life-giving presence”.

elsewhere as they “represent the boundary between the human and the divine” (Habel 2011:54) and are therefore apt “vehicles” to think by or reflect. And the same applies to the miraculous snake, whose natural abilities, as we have seen, easily transform it into a more-than-natural “shrewd” being, capable of reading the gods’ minds, the “familiar of the goddess” in the ancient Near East (Wurst 2000:95). What has the contemplative experience with the snake led to, what “new world” has opened up before Adam and Eve? It has led to a shift from naive innocence in Eden to a life of enlightenment or self-consciousness,²⁰ an awareness now of a life of the new realities of both the positive and the negative (Habel 2000:58; Newsom 2000:69).²¹ And this happens through the agency of mother Earth and her “children”, or in the words of Habel (2011:60): “This narrative is about grasping life in the real world; the primal experience — through which this world is revealed, and *Adamah* — the good mother of all life, are part of both the primal and the known world.” Nature it seems is indeed good to think by, even though she as an innocent bystander (Habel 2011:62) cannot be blamed for the alienation becoming part of life that struck wide and deep.

A LATER EDEN (SONG OF SONGS)

Genesis 2–3 seems to be a rather “innocent” text compared to what later interpretations of the so-called “Fall” have made of it. In the same way, the Song of Songs has also been turned into some kind of esoteric text by later readings, namely the allegorical, cultic-mythological and drama theories, to name but a few (Pope 1977:89–229; Exum 2005:73–86). This is most probably due to the metaphoric character of this timeless poetry that understandably evokes far more than its plain-sense reading. Although it abounds with metaphors, the Song presents itself first and foremost as a celebration of erotic love and sexual desire between two young lovers.

²⁰ Both Newsom (2000:72) and Habel (2011:60) add that this also implies the discovering of the moral agency to blame others. Von Rad (1972:89) says this is indicative of the widening of life’s horizons, “an increase of life not only in the sense of pure intellectual enrichment but also a familiarity with, and power over, mysteries that lie beyond man.”

²¹ Newsom (2000:70) interestingly links the large heads of human infants that makes child birth so difficult to this new self-consciousness.

They frolic both indoors and (mostly) outdoors in their game of hide and seek, to discover each other in bodily, sensual gratification (Exum 2005:1) and being uplifted to greater realities. The Song's subversive character (see especially LaCoque 1988) of subtly questioning class hierarchies, patriarchy and mainstream religion makes it the most unbiblical book in the Bible (Meyers 1988:177). The two young lovers are seemingly not married as they slip away to private intimate spots to enjoy their love, even though they might dream of a marriage at some stage (Bloch & Bloch 1995:12). The woman refuses to be controlled by her patriarchal brothers (8:8–10) and follows her own heart as she and her lover are imaged in diverse roles, both royal and ordinary. The absence of the name of the Hebrew national god in the book is conspicuous, most probably to make it acceptable for Second Temple sensibilities and not to confuse Yahweh with survivals of the fertility cults that often surface in the Song, making the "other world" far more inclusive than what first meets the eye (Fontaine 2001:126–127). For the purpose and interest of this article, it is especially the Song's embracing of both wild and tamed nature in its own right and by acknowledging it as "kin" that is important (Viviers 2001:144, 148–152; see also Fontaine 2001:127–141). Exum (2005:13) aptly emphasises nature's agency when she says: "Nature in all its glory reflects and participates in their mutual delight." Due to limited space the following focus on the Song will be much briefer than that on Genesis 2–3. Two telling examples of natural retreats (6:11–13; 8:5–7), the Song's main metaphor according to Landy (1983:31), will be highlighted to demonstrate nature's contributing role in experiencing especially extent, leading to contemplation. In a similar way, however, ART's other properties will also be emphasised with appropriate exegetical insights. The Song's later Eden might have a completely different outcome than the Genesis Eden but the psychological effect of nature on the human mind is similar.

The "going down" (*yārad*), encapsulating being away, to the nut grove in Song 6:11 points to "a real visit to a real garden" when compared to the preceding visit to the gardens in 6:2 (Murphy 1990:179). Gerleman (1981:189) is, however, correct that the boundary between "real" and imaginative in the Song is not always that clear.

“Reality” and metaphor more than often collapse into each other, often creating a merging of humans and nature — humans become nature through metaphor (4:12–5:1, woman as garden) and nature humanlike through personification (2:8–9, the gazelle that speaks as the lover). The nut garden therefore also carries the connotation of being one of the lovers itself, either the body of the man that the woman seeks to explore if she is the speaker or the man discovering her if he speaks. Longman (2001:184,185 following Pope) indicates that the imagery of an intact nut can represent both the testicle of a male (see also the slang “nuts”) but also that of a vagina when visualised as open. If one chooses the first image then the words would make sense in the mouth of the beloved female; choosing the second would make sense if the desiring male is the speaker. Longman opts for a female speaker. Barbiero (2011:351, 354), however, opts for the man as the speaker, undergirding his choice with the budding vines and pomegranates that usually describe the woman’s awakening sexuality elsewhere in the Song (4:13; 7:9). The latter aptly indicates the purpose (compatibility) of this private retreat, to contemplate on the desire that is evoked by the beauty of blooming and budding nature, imaging the lover. The fully fledged belonging or being “at home” in nature indicated earlier in the first Eden so as to be “compatible” to meet humans’ inclinations, is also appropriately expressed here, even though subtly. Their “merging” with nature, as just indicated, implies their being fully part of it. It will allow them both a space and act as a “partner” to do what they have come to do, reflect on love. Fascination has also been touched upon already. Barbiero (2011:353) notes that the twice repeated verb *rā’ā* in verse 11 to observe the sprouting of new life in nature²² is reminiscent of an intensity of seeing, of “looking with emotion”. The Song author also herewith unknowingly acknowledges one of the emphases in ART, namely that our exposure to nature needs to be mindful and needs cultivation (Sato & Connor 2013:203). One can be in nature but so absent-minded or focused on other things that the “epiphany” of captivating sights, forgotten sounds and refreshing smells (Barbiero 2011:112, on Song 2:10–14) can go unnoticed. The reference to the nut (*ġgôz*), a hapax legomenon, evokes, apart from its bodily-erotic connotations, also its use as

²² Notably also the green stream-bed or valley, *bēibê hannāhal* (Pope 1977:579, 582).

love-food or an aphrodisiac and it being an exotic fruit in Israel (Exum 2005:224; Barbiero 2011:352). Barbiero (2011:352) takes fascination a step further as he sees in this young woman “heaven” (the preceding 6:10) that has become incarnated in this exotic earthly garden. Fascination implies the presence of extent, a rich and inspiring setting²³ that lures towards a connection with “another world”. 6:12 is a clear example of this upliftment, of nature “catalysing” the mind to wander into a different (conceptual) world. But commentators agree that verse 12 is perhaps the most enigmatic verse in the Song. Even the LXX and Vulgate (and many modern scholars) struggled with the corrupt Masoretic text to make sense of it by having it referred to (unconvincingly) the proper name Aminadab (Exum 2005:225).²⁴ Exum (2005:225) argues that the first part of the verse *lo’ yāda ‘tī* (“I did not know”) requires an object that implies *naḥšī* (“desire”), while the latter functions simultaneously as a subject for the rest of the verse: “It (*naḥšī*) set me on the chariots of ...” It is especially with *‘ammî-nādîb* (the two words coupled with a *maqqēp*) that emendations differ. Exum (2005:225, in line with Fox and Longman) emends by “reading *mrkbt* without the mater lectionis, as the singular, ‘chariot,’ and ‘*m* (‘with’) for ‘my (‘my people’)” and *nādîb*²⁵ referring to a noble or princely man. She translates as follows: “I did not know myself, carried off amid chariots with a prince”. It is also clear she opts for the woman as speaker. Munro (1995:30), however, lets the man speak as being elevated to “the chariots of my people, as prince”, capturing the royal fiction of the Song. Barbiero, also opting for the male speaker (2011:319), translates “the chariots of my noble people”,²⁶ acknowledging that *‘ammî-nādîb* without the article is strange (2011:360). Barbiero (2011:361) sees a subtle reference to the chariots of Israel with which Elijah was transported into heaven (2 Kgs 2:12) — “the same numinous power, not only of the earthly (v. 4) but of the heavenly (v. 10) army and of Elijah’s chariots of fire (v.

²³ “Order” is implied not only by referring specifically to a “garden” (*gn*) but also by the three kinds of fruits — nuts, pomegranates and vines — grouped together.

²⁴ “The Septuagint took the verse as ‘my soul did not know; it made me chariots of Aminadab’ (*ouk egnō hē psyche mou: etheto me harmata Aminadab*). The Vulgate rendered ‘I did not know; my soul disturbed me because of the chariots of Aminadab’ (*nescivi anima mea coturbavit me proper quadrigas Aminadab*)” (Longman 2001:185).

²⁵ See also *bat-nādîb* in 7:2.

²⁶ See also Pope (1977:584), “chariots of my princely people”.

12) is personified by the woman”. And it is to this (sublime) woman that he now yields! Whatever the final answer might be about the speaker or the meaning of the puzzling verse 12 amongst commentators, there is agreement about its acknowledgment of the effect of extent in nature: to become inspired and uplifted by nature here in the guise of a nut/vine/pomegranate garden to the “losing of oneself in amazement” to a higher, alternative (conceptual) world. This garden effortlessly assists in evoking the love desire to become transported elsewhere. It is quite interesting to note the terminology used by scholars to encapsulate this wandering into “another world.” Barbiero (2011:317, 353, 361) speaks of “contemplation” and “transported by love”, Longman (2001:187) uses the word “transportation” and Exum (2005:223) “transformation”, all familiar terms in ART describing the effect of extent.

Song 8:5–7 forms part of the closing unit of the Song (8:5–14) and is another telling example of a retreat to nature, its enjoyment and its subtle participation in this deep reflection on the nature of love itself. Verse 5 begins with a rhetorical question by the “chorus” (daughters of Jerusalem) who presents the two lovers ascending from the wilderness to Jerusalem, and is reminiscent of Song 3:6. The combination of wilderness and apple tree pictures a scene of both far away (wild) and nearby (cultivated) countryside with no dichotomy between these two. The wilderness (*hammidbār*) is associated with both danger, uncanny mystery and death but it is also the place where the forces of life and love reside.²⁷ It can therefore appropriately be described as a location where love is at “home” (Barbiero 2001:447) privately and intimately, capturing the “being away” of the two lovers. Both there and under the apple tree provide an inspiring setting for the reflection on the powerful force of love as such, the compatibility or purpose of this retreat. But preceding the latter and conjuring it, is first the love-play under the apple tree,²⁸ also suggestively anticipated earlier already by the intimate “leaning”²⁹ of the woman on her lover. Earlier

²⁷ Barbiero (2011:146-147, 447) refers to the Canaanite Astarte, the goddess of love, who is often associated with the desert. She is, however, only one amongst many other divinities representing life’s forces that were believed to reside there.

²⁸ *šām*, “there,” is strongly emphasised (Barbiero 2011:449).

²⁹ The hitpa’el participle, *mitrappeqet*, a hapax, has an erotic connotation in this context.

references to the apple tree were overtly erotic (see also 2:3,³⁰ 2:5, 7:8). Here she “awakened”³¹ him, whilst simultaneously recalling her lover’s mother whose “dallying” (Exum 2005:249) under the same apple tree led to her lovemaking, conception and giving birth to him.³² LaCoque (1998:166 following Lys) aptly states that he is now being born to her for a second time, as a lover (see also Munro 1995:72; Exum 2005:249; Barbiero 2011:452). Awe-inspiring nature and the experience of sexual intimacy imply fascination that facilitates the reflection on love itself.

The sensuousness of the love experience in and with nature becomes the means towards this reflective contemplation on love, the only explicit didactic/philosophical/meditative section in the Song, and therefore also regarded by many as its focal point. To what world of thought does the effect of the extent of nature lead, to what conceptual world does the mind wander, uplift itself, flowing forth from this rich and intense experience? The woman speaker becomes transcended into the universe of all lovers, deeply apprehending the astounding power of love. It has been mentioned that the wilderness embodies mystery but also the apple tree (Gerleman 1981:215; Pope 1977:663; Murphy 1995:191). Barbiero is convinced that the apple tree here is used polemically against the tree of knowledge of Genesis 2–3. The latter, however, regarded as an “apple tree”, is post-biblical but nevertheless suggests an intertextual link. In the first Eden the tree’s fruit implied death but here the tree is a “co-agent” as haven when the woman “arouses” her lover to life (2011:459, 450 fn. 62). Even her seal of identity (v. 6a) to be intimately carried by her lover to “own him” subtly evokes also a bond of connectedness that extends into the afterworld, as seals were often buried with the deceased (Longman 2001:210). But it is especially the comparison of the personified love-force to the forces of death and the grave (*kammāwet, kišē’ôl*), flame and mighty flame (*rěšāpěhā, šalhebetyā*³³) and mighty

³⁰ The inferiority of the wild trees compared to the apple tree (lover) indicates that the Song is not inclusively eco-friendly. The same applies to the preceding verse (2:2) where the woman as lily is elevated far above the thorns of the field.

³¹ *ôrartikā*, “I roused you,” is clearly erotic here (Munro 1995:84, 123).

³² Both Exum (2005:250) and Barbiero (2011:448) emphasise the dilemma of this verse for the allegorical exposition of the Song, namely the lover (equalling God) being “aroused” and earlier conceived and born from an earthly woman.

³³ Exum (2005:253-254) shows that both the LXX and Vulgate understood the ending *yâ* as

waters and rivers (*mayīm rabbīm, nēhārôt*), all conspicuously emphasised through parallelism, that the cosmic world comes into focus. These natural elements of earth/ground, fire and water that has been personalised in Ugaritic mythology, provide a link to this “other world” (Fontaine 2001:137–8). All these terms evoke the well-known Ugaritic deities: the powerful Mot, the counterpart of Baal; the jealous possessive Sheol; the chthonic, underworld god Resheph also known for spreading plagues; and Yam the god of the sea/chaos waters also known as “Prince Nahar” (“Prince River”) (Exum 2005:253–4). Exum (2005:254) eloquently recaps this conceptual, otherworldly transportation: “Mot (Death), Sheol, Resheph, flames of Yah, cosmic waters, and Nahar — lend cosmic proportions to the struggle between love and death.” The “presence” of nature in this reflection is quite interesting — it starts in nature and concludes with natural elements cosmically transformed. Nature is indeed good to think by! Longman (2001:214) adds another powerful, socially constructed force/resource, with which love contends, namely money (v. 7). And as expected, love, as before, stands its ground. Money cannot buy it, including the *mohar* (bride-price) which the Song critiques (Barbiero 2011:471).

Habel (2011:66) wishes that the memory of the first Eden of blissful harmony will remain in the “post-Eden ecosystem” despite the estrangement of relationships. The Song of Songs, especially in its embracement of the agency/partnership of nature in its celebration of love, represents such an early memory and is therefore appropriately referred to as a rediscovered Eden. Nature in the first and this later Eden is not only good to live from and live with, but notably also good to think by.

an intensive; she, however, admits haplography could have happened where *yâ* represents an abbreviated version of Yahweh. She innovatively translates this term “almighty flame,” capturing both possibilities. Fox (1985:171) says it could function just as “a vivid term for lightning,” and even if the *yâ* ending refers to Yahweh, not too much theological meaning should be inferred from it.

CONCLUSION

Attention Restoration Theory provides a fine psychological-theoretical perspective of the contribution of nature to overall human well-being. It appropriately acknowledges our evolutionary origins from nature and connectedness to it, notably our preferences for natural areas that are interesting, accessible and safe. It also provides insight in the shaping of our minds, the working together of both our directed attention and involuntary attention mechanisms to restore our effectivity when we become mentally fatigued. Its emphasis on the embracement of nature as a “partner” to assist in the restoration process and allowing also for fruitful contemplation reaffirms our interconnectedness to and dependency on the natural world. This bond with nature becomes aptly demonstrated through the relationship notions of being away (to be exposed to environments with a new cognitive content), compatibility (to fulfil our aims and inclinations), fascination (to be inspired by a rich and interesting natural environment) and extent (to be uplifted by an ordered and mysteriously interesting natural space to “another world”). ART acknowledges that nature is good to think by!

It is not only the prehistoric San hunters that realised that nature can become a partner in contemplation, but also later historical cultures embraced nature for the same reason. The two biblical narratives on a lost and revived garden of “Eden”, also part of the broader ancient Near Eastern context, utilised nature as a source and “partner” in the search for meaning. Genesis 2–3 represents a mythical aetiology of lost innocence and the later Song a celebration of the power of erotic love. Both these narratives appreciate nature in its own right and exemplify that nature is indeed good to think by!

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