

# The Image of the Garden in English literature

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## تصوير الحديقة في الأدب الانكليزي

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**Abstract:**

Throughout history, the image of the garden has been used by various poets to convey certain messages or to reflect what the poet wants to show. The matter of usage is relative from one age to another and from one poet to another due to the characteristics of the age, its needs, and its nature. The image of the garden would be traced from the beginning of English literature till the Victorian age, and the focus would be on selected poems by certain poets to see how each one of them uses this image in his own way. In addition to exploring what purpose it serves and whether there is a certain philosophy behind it.

**Key words:** poems, garden image, nature, philosophy, English literature, characteristics, the Victorian age, the Romantic age, civilization, society, Arab poetry.

**المخلص:-**

على مر التاريخ، استخدم العديد من الشعراء صورة الحديقة لنقل رسائل معينة أو لتعكس ما يريد الشاعر إظهاره. إن مسألة الاستخدام نسبية من عصر إلى آخر ومن شاعر إلى آخر بسبب خصائص العصر واحتياجاته وطبيعته. سيتم تتبع صورة الحديقة منذ بداية الأدب الإنكليزي حتى العصر الفيكتوري، وسيتم التركيز على قصائد مختارة لشعراء معينين لمعرفة كيف يستخدم كل واحد منهم هذه الصورة بطريقة الخاصة. بالإضافة إلى استكشاف الغرض الذي يخدمه وما إذا كانت هناك فلسفة معينة وراءه.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الحديقة، صورة، أدب إنكليزي، خصائص، العصور، العصر الفيكتوري، العصر الرومانسي، الحضارة، المجتمع، الفلسفة، الطبيعة، قصائد، الشعر العربي.

Throughout history, the image of the garden has been used by various poets to convey certain messages or to reflect what the poet wants to show. The matter of usage is relative from one age to another and from one poet to another due to the characteristics of the age, its needs, and its nature. The image of the garden would be traced from the beginning of English literature till the Victorian age, and the focus would be on selected poems by certain poets to see how each one of them uses this image in his own way. In addition to exploring what purpose it serves and whether there is a certain philosophy behind it.

The English landscape garden of the 17th century was decorated with precisely laid out mathematical patterns. This style was highly influenced by the Italian and the French style; in reaction to this ornate continental style, English critics, led by Richard Addison and Alexander Pope, began to move for a change to a more "natural" nature in gardens, and this was reflected in English poetry as well. Tennyson, Marvell, Kipling, Dickinson, Mohammed Alhawari, and many other poets from different eras wrote about the image of the garden and how each one of them uses this image in different concepts according to the circumstances, social, political, and literary conditions they lived in.

## The Garden Image through English History

### 1- The Old English Literature (500-1100)

The image of nature in general and the image of the garden in particular don't have that significance in Old English poetry due to its nature. The Old English poetry has its own features, which reflect the type of life the Anglo-Saxons had. Their poetry is concerned with heroic deeds, tribe codes, invasions, and war glory. They had no interest in the nature that surrounded them.

### 2- The Medieval Literature (1100- 1485)

In this age, there are glimpses of nature for the first time which is something new that marks this era and makes it different from the previous one. It is a shifting point where nature is really noticed by poets. After the Norman quest, people became more civilized and had a kind of stable life. They were settled within the Norman reign

and the tribe's codes vanished as time went by. Out of stability people started to pay attention to the beauty that exists in nature, like flowers. The best example of this is the Medieval poem which is called *The Owl & The Nightingale* in which there are many references to roses which are used as symbols of love. Images of war, mercenaries and destructive lands are replaced with the beautiful and the colorful side of nature. Those lines are from *The Owl and The Nightingale* with all the references to the flowers in nature for the first time:

But I bring every delight with me; every creature is glad on my account, [435] and rejoices when I come, and looks forward to my arrival. The flowers begin to open and bloom, both on the trees and in the fields. The lily with her fair complexion welcomes me, I'll have you know, [440] and invites me with her beautiful appearance to fly to her. The blushing rose, too, springing from the briar, [445] tells me to sing a joyful song for love of her. And so I do, night and day---the more I sing, the more I can---and serenade them with my singing, [450].

### 3- The Elizabethan Age or the Renaissance age (1485-1603)

The poetry of this age was influenced by Chaucer's traditions in which the folk songs and the Italian verse are dominant. The common themes of this era are the relationship between men and women, and courtly love with its hypocrisy. As for the form the sonnet was the most popular one at that time which is originally an Italian form.

Henry Howard is one of the Elizabethan poets who tackles nature in his poem *Descriptions of Spring* in which he describes all the elements of nature like, busy bees, buds, a turtle, a green hill and a singing nightingale. In spite of the beautiful nature around him, the poet doesn't enjoy this scene because of his melancholy. He depicts the beauty of nature to show the contrast between what he feels inside and what is there outside. He is not in harmony with all the beauty outside (Poetry foundation eds).

The image of the garden is designed as a source of pleasure, intellectual and moral instruction during the Renaissance age. The image of the garden flourished in the 16<sup>th</sup> century because it emerged in reality as an aesthetic interest. During that time, people were interested in garden's design and techniques, even new plants

were brought from the Middle East, America and Russia. The image of garden was taken seriously as a form of art in the Renaissance (Allen, v-vi ix).

#### 4- The Neoclassical age

The best and the most popular example of the garden image is found in Milton's Paradise Lost, in which the English countryside's influence is obvious in the descriptions of Milton's Eden, despite the fact that some critics suggest that Milton is influenced by the gardens of the Italian Renaissance, which he came across in his travels. (Knott, 67

In the Eden of Paradise Lost, there is a beautiful world where Adam and Eve find pleasure, happiness, and protection. Milton describes his garden as having brooks, flowers, trees, fruits, and amazing fragrances, in addition to an extraordinary fertility and a blessing. (Ibid, 681).

There are two images of the garden, one before the sin and the second one after the sin, and they are completely different. The image of the garden after the sin is wild, "pinching cold and scorching heat" with strong winds, and this garden is the exact opposite of the first one, which is beautiful and peaceful. Besides, Milton focuses on Adam and Eve's roles as gardeners, especially Eve, who is more sensitive, and she takes care of the flowers; she even names them and takes care of the garden (Ibid).

In this age, the use of nature and the garden image is for didactic reasons. Milton gives a moral lesson by depicting the image of the two different gardens, and this use is one of the characteristics of the Neoclassical spirit in which nature is seen as a law and is used to give didactic lessons. (Knott,74). These formal gardens were chiefly inspired by Italian Renaissance and French Baroque gardens adorning aristocratic palaces. They reflected a conviction that the world, as set up according to God's plan, was essentially an ordered one that offered itself to description by scientific laws (David, 5-8). Gardens drew their inspiration partly from the neoclassical landscape paintings of Claude Lorrain, Nicolas Poussin, and Salvator Rosa by appealing to the ideal of rural retirement expressed by Horace and Virgil (Streatfield, 19).

## 5- The Romantic Age

In the summer of 1805, Samuel Taylor Coleridge observed in his private journal that as he contemplated the changing landscape from the interior of his country home, he found himself confronting something familiar and forgotten about his own inner nature:

In looking at objects of nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering through the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking for, a symbolic language for something within me that already and forever exists, rather than observing anything new. Even when the latter is the case, yet still I have always an obscure feeling as if the new phenomena were the dim awakening of a forgotten or hidden truth of my inner nature (Coleridge,115).

Coleridge's informal reflections on the nocturnal landscape neatly summarize the Romantic relationship with nature, which unfolds as a dialogical process toward self-realization. For the Romantics, landscape functions as an important medium that draws the contemplative poet closer to a state of self-knowledge. Coleridge entirely sidesteps the dualistic categories that determine a more superficial interaction with landscape, in which the beholder directs his visual attention outward toward the external regions in order to gain new information about his surrounding environment. Instead, he discovers that the landscape illuminates something profound within himself, not distinct and separate from himself. (Wong, 12).

The Romantics find inspiration in nature; their attitude towards nature is the opposite of the Neoclassicals, as they react against what the previous age thinks of nature. They want to draw people's attention to nature with all that was going on with changing industrialism and all these factors that affect nature. It is safe to say that the garden landscape became expressive in this age, where it no longer had to be deciphered but instead was turned into a space that could express the beholder's own feelings. It was therefore experienced differently according to the prevailing mood. A walk through the garden thus became a very personal affair and provided an opportunity for introspection. (Hunt, 9). What characterizes the Romantics garden image is the mixture between nature and imagination.

## 6- The Victorian Age

It is an age of progress and science where they move towards knowledge in methodical steps, unlike the Romantics, who gain knowledge from their instinctive leaps, imagination, and nature. Nature is the source of moral force for humans, but this is not the case with the Victorians. (Wong,30-31).

The Victorian aesthetics had moved away from ideals and general formulas to the particular and the incidental, like Matthew Arnold said: "Poets must begin with an idea of the world in order not to be prevailed over by the world's multitudinousness." The Victorians mostly follow the materialistic knowledge of nature, because the materialistic atmosphere keeps the artist away from interacting with nature as one to be united. (Ibid, 43). They no longer approach nature to reach the metaphysical truth about humans, such as Tennyson's Maud which is full of natural romantic elements.

### **Andrew Marvell's The Garden:**

There is no doubt that the Romantics give nature a very special place and priority; so does Marvell even though he is a metaphysical poet who lived in a turning point in the history of Western scientific thought and time of thinkers like Descartes, Galileo, and Locke, who were presenting their most important works. Marvell takes the side of nature against the man of the Renaissance; he also presents nature as the antithesis of human culture; besides, he considers humans not as superior to control nature but as a part of nature. Marvell's belief is similar to what ecologists believe in, which is, "Nature does not exist to serve humans" (Judi.67).

He emphasizes that every natural phenomenon "possesses a value in its own right, without reference to human interests." He gives priority to nature in this stanza:

No white nor red was ever seen  
So am'rous as this lovely green.  
Fond lovers, cruel as their flame,  
Cut in these trees their mistress' name;  
Little, alas, they know or heed

How far these beauties hers exceed!  
Fair trees! wheres'e'er your barks I wound,  
No name shall but your own be found.

He tries his best to make humans realize the value of nature and what they really miss by being in the city, all that through the garden. The poet is highly connected to nature through the garden because it is so fresh and alive, and he enjoys his life as long as he is surrounded by nature. His heart is filled with pleasure due to the sight of the garden with all its aspects; he tries to make a connection between plants and human emotions. He sees nature as an animate with which he is unified because he has the idea of interdependence of the human and non-human world as a unified whole. He minimizes the distance between humans and nature by making a bridge:

The mind, that ocean where each kind  
Does straight its own resemblance find,  
Yet it creates, transcending these,  
Far other worlds, and other seas;  
Annihilating all that's made  
To a green thought in a green shade

He refers to the union of mind with nature by the existence of harmony between them. Here, Marvell is like the Romantics, focusing on the imaginative power of the mind, which leads to the green thought. Invading the sanctity of wilderness with no respect whatsoever to nature is one of the characteristics of the Renaissance man, so what Marvell wants to draw attention to is the purity of nature through the beautiful image of the garden (Ibid,69-70)

The Garden is characterized by its uniqueness and romantic expression; it is metaphysical in its word and classical in its music, all these combinations together. It is romantic because of the dominant theme, which is nature, and the expression of personal thoughts and emotions concerning nature and humans. It is metaphysical because of the use of argument, allusions from the Bible, which is similar to Eden, myths like the Greek ones, and metaphysical philosophy that

are represented in the mind that has another world where the garden exists. He combines the romantic element with the religious one in his description of the soul singing and moving from one tree to another like a bird, which prepares his soul for the eternal flight of salvation, which is at the same time a biblical reference to the Holy Spirit. The flaws of society don't apply in the garden. The metaphysical element also lies in creating a balance between the emotional side and the intellectual one, the physical pleasure and the mental pleasure. His soul is just like an ocean that contains all the elements and images of the real and the spiritual world. The classical form of rhyme and rhythm with the heroic couplet—all these make the poem a classical one.

In *The Garden*, Marvell is meditating in the garden, and some critics interpret this poem as a response to the original Biblical garden, Eden, yet others suggest that this poem is a meditation on sex, political ambition, sex and other themes. In this poem, Marvell deals with two extremes that are opposite to each other. He uses the garden as an escape from the busy world, the public life, or anything that is beyond the nature of the garden. He gets away from the noise of life to the garden, where he can have some rest and peace. The garden is like the shelter that he turns to whenever he feels the pressure of life. It is the place where his mind and soul are at ease, and it is the place where love and passion would blossom: "When we have run our passion's heat/Love hither makes his best retreat".

Christopher Ricks, who is an English critic known for his *The Force of Poetry*, in his essay on Marvell discusses Marvell's fondness for using "self-inwoven similie" or "reflexive imagery" where things are compared to themselves, like in the sixth stanza:

Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less, Withdraws into its happiness;  
The mind, that ocean where each kind Does straight its own resemblance find.

The mind needs nothing more than itself and its own thoughts for happiness. But Ricks suggests that Marvell's fondness for the 'self-inwoven simile' "is a symptom of the English Civil War, which saw a nation at war with itself, much as the two images in Marvell's similes are often of the same kind, and one image is pitted against itself". It is worth mentioning that some critics suggest that Marvell wrote *The*

Garden in order to show his patron's withdrawal from public life as noble and grand, because in 1650, Marvell entered the service of Sir Thomas Fairfax, who had been a commander of the New Model Army under Cromwell during the English Civil War. Fairfax had just retired from this role, turning down the offer of leading the army into Scotland; and it may be that (Tearle).

When we have run our Passion' heat, Love hither makes his best retreat.

The Gods, that mortal Beauty chase, Still in a Tree did end their race.

Apollo hunted Daphne so, Only that She might Laurel grow; And Pan did after Syrinx speed, Not as a Nymph, but for a Reed.

Marvell uses Greek mythology in this stanza in which Apollo pursues Daphne, then Daphne becomes a laurel, which is a tree. Syrinx also escapes from Pan to become a reed, which is tall grass. By doing so, Marvell gives the trees of the garden a spiritual value, and he asserts that they were precisely as the trees that the gods valued.

### **Tennyson's Maud:**

Maud was published in 1855 during the Crimean War, by which the poem ends, and this end makes the poem a problematic one. It is a monodrama,

which means "a drama in which all parts are spoken by a single person" and that is why there is only one point of view in this poem. This poem consists of 28 soliloquies that are spoken at different times. Tennyson himself describes this poem as "a little Hamlet", because the protagonist of the poem experiences all kinds of psychological suffering, and he is going through loss and love, misery and sadness. The character, or the hero, is unnamed; he is described as a son of a suicide and a victim of poverty. He is a man of moods and fancies, which means he is not really a balanced character. Maud is mainly about love, which leads this character to be a murderer and leaves him in exile and madness (Brown, 756)

Maud is something totally different because of the romantic dominance, especially the garden image, which reflects what the character feels. Tennyson calls this poem "Drama of the soul" and it

became very popular because of its ambiguity (Okura,2). One of the very interesting things about "Maud" is that it is Tennyson's earliest serious endeavor to express himself in any form of dramatic art (Goble,45)

There are many different images of the garden due to the feelings of the speaker. In one of the scenes, he describes himself as a dark garden that is influenced by the whiteness and brightness of Maud's face (Okura,25). The poem shows that "Tennyson moves away from a pastoral or Edenic vision toward one which, while darker, is also more tolerant and accepting" (Kincaid,112).

Come into the garden, Maud,  
For the black bat, night, has flown,  
Come into the garden, Maud,  
I am here at the gate alone;

The speaker is calling his lady to come into the garden as he waits there in those most famous lines of Maud. At night, the garden in which the speaker waits for his love to arrive is called by him as 'our garden'. With the images of the garden, which consist of the rose, lily, woodbine, acacia, and pimpernel, the poet creates an image of a wonderful paradise and marks the poem more remarkable. He is surrounded by the garden roses to which he expresses his love for Maud, and he compares his love to a 'Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls.' As the speaker waits for his beloved, his passions and desires are free, and the various elements of nature are sympathizing with his passionate wait. This part is full of images and symbols, like 'Musk rose' is a symbol of charm, and 'Planet of Love,' which is a symbol of sensuousness. The woodbine is associated with chains of love, and the poet is imprisoned by chains of love. "Jessamine" is the symbolism for envy, and "Slender acacia" is a symbol of platonic love. He depicts all the elements of the surrounding garden. He further describes the atmosphere, saying that the night's winds have blown the musk of rose and the woodbines are carried by the wind. The speaker speaks to the lily, saying that his beloved is overjoyed with him only while the dancers make her weary and tired as long as they are around her, because his beloved is genuinely joyful in his presence and everything else is

pretension. The moon is half gone, and the sun is rising, marking the harmony of day and night in the short moment of dawn. He speaks to the rose and says his lady love is only his own and thus belongs to nobody else, which is a sign of possessiveness out of obsession. He describes his lady as being beautiful with violet blue eyes, and her walks are so sweet that the March wind sets the jewels of her footprints and leads it to the valleys of Paradise that had been their point of meeting.

In spite of his wait, the lady didn't come, and the speaker says that the acacia stopped shaking, plants are in slumber, and white lake-blossom fell into the lake, but the rose stayed awake with the lilies till the breaking of the dawn (Ibid).

There was an article in The North Americaji published in October 1855, which had a review of Maud: "There is no doubt that this poem is a charming rosary, strung of beads, very unlike one another, of playful, or sad, or meditative poetry, always poetry, and always natural, fresh, true, and new. Have we - if we study our rights carefully, - have we any right to ask more than this?" and the Reverend William Jowett, Master of Balliol College, Oxford, wrote, "I want to tell you how I admire 'Maud', No poem since Shakespeare seems to show equal power of the same kind or equal knowledge of human nature. No modern poem contains more lives that ring in the ears of men; I do not know any verse out of Shakespeare in which the ecstasy of love soars to such a height," (Goble, 37, 40).

All images of the garden have replaced the characters in Maud to parallel with the speaker's psychological development. Maud is a complete departure from In Memoriam in its aesthetics and tone, which Lowell calls "the antiphonal voice to In Memoriam". Maud is a poem in which Tennyson was caught in a dilemma between a didactic moral aesthetic, which is his role as a Victorian poet, and his psychological, artistic vision. Harold Nicolson was one of the first modern critics to identify a conflict between the emotional poet and the didactic laureate (Okura,1,4)

Emily Dickinson's New feet within my garden go.

Emily Dickinson was famous for being a gardener; even when she died, she was laid in her coffin with a knot of blue field violets. She used to send her friends bunches of flowers with a verse

attached, which was something appreciated more than the verse itself. Local people referred to her as "the Myth of Amherst". Dickinson finds in the garden the place where her spiritual side would be fulfilled, and the evidence of this lies in her preface to the second volume of poems. Mabel Loomis Todd, her friend and editor, wrote of her,

"Storm, wind, the wild March sky, sunsets and dawns; the birds and bees, butterflies and flowers of her garden, with a few trusted human friends, were sufficient companionship"(Parker). Her poem New feet within my garden go deals with the image of the garden, and it is obvious from the title .

New feet within my garden go,  
New fingers stir the sod;  
A troubadour upon the elm  
Betrays the solitude.  
New children play upon the green,  
New weary sleep below;  
And still the pensive spring returns,  
And still the punctual snow!

The poem consists of two stanzas in which Emily summarizes the circle of life. The repetition of the word "New" indicates the rebirth, the new life, and the spring season. In the first stanza, she refers to the new generation who would come to the garden in spring. It is a new season, a new time with new people and new aspects all around. In the second stanza, she talks of two contradicting images: new children would come and play, while there are others who sleep below, which means death. And she emphasizes the word "still," which means continuity; after winter comes spring, and death does not stop the circle of life. All the images she uses summarize the four seasons with all their features. The image of the bird singing in the elm is the source of music that breaks the summer silence of the garden. Autumn is the new weary sleep below, Winter as the punctual snow, and Spring is represented by the new feet, new fingers : " And still the pensive Spring returns" And so on it goes as season follows season (Ibid).

It is like behind every great poet, there is a garden. The garden image is not exclusive to the Romantics, who are known for their deep connection to nature with all its elements. Many poets tackle the garden image according to their style and their own personality; Marvell, Tennyson, and Dickinson are some of those poets who use the garden image. Each one of them reflects his own philosophy, personality, and what his society needs. Marvell finds in the garden the peaceful atmosphere everyone seeks to get away from the troubles of life, while Tennyson finds the garden a passionate companion to whom he talks and expresses his love for Maud, and he finds the garden a suitable and perfect place where they meet because everything in the garden would be in harmony with what they feel, as we see how the flowers are waiting with him for Maud to come. He compares his life to the garden that needs Maud to shine upon him and complete the natural picture. Dickinson finds in the garden how the circle of life goes on, and how the garden could combine contradictions like, life and death, winter and spring, and green and white snow—all these beautiful and different images that bring life to the simplest form. The garden will always be a part of human life and therefore a part of poetry, no matter in what frame it is used, but surely it will always be there. It has a special place in Arab poetry as well, such as Mohammed Alhawary, an Egyptian poet, who writes a whole poem in the description of the garden with all its elements. That indicates the importance of the garden for every culture, because after all, it is the right place for the spiritual side to grow. A garden is like a mini picture of the wide nature around us, which cannot be cut off from our life or our civilization.

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