



Berwick -upon -Tweed Educational Association
“The Poetry of the Garden”
A Lecture by Dr Richard Moore, creative writer and lecturer,
Newcastle University.

**Friday 12th January 2018, 10 -12 noon, Berwick Voluntary Centre, Tweed St,
Berwick**

Gardens in literature and particularly in poetry? Are there many? Well, the answer is a resounding yes, but of course not all have particular significance. Act Two of *The Mikado* is set in Koko's garden but this is at most a useful ploy for the scene-setters. It allows the introduction of some picturesque Japanese garden effects. A slightly more significant case is that in *Alice in Wonderland*. Here when the heroine enters the Queen of Hearts' garden she comes upon three living playing cards painting the white roses on a rose-tree red. Red roses symbolise the House of Lancaster while white roses are the emblem of the House of York. Playing cards meanwhile with their arbitrary values reflect the paper-thin insubstantiality of power. Painted values replace intrinsic ones and the power-pattern can easily be reversed.

Whether decorative or meaningful, gardens have always been an important concept, obviously not least because the Garden of Eden, the so-called lost paradise. This word *paradise* has multiple origins. It develops in Western languages from the Greek word *paradeisos*, the old Persian word *pairidaeza*, and the modern Arabic and Persian *firdaus*. All of these originally denoted a walled garden. In the arid environment of the Near East, a garden has to be carefully and laboriously constructed with watercourses for irrigation, and precious flowers and fruits protected from theft by a surrounding wall. The conflation of these words denoted exactly the type of garden built and cultivated in the Near East - a garden also linked with religious imagery of heaven, especially in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Such links have wide repercussions. They create a metaphorical bridge between the divine paradise and an elusive paradise on earth.

Another key aspect of garden literature is its use in Mediaeval allegory. For this we need to go back to the *Roman de la Rose*. This is a fascinating work in which the lover-narrator dreams of a crimson rose, which symbolises his lady's love. Braving all obstacles, he seeks to pluck the flower. The task is set in a walled garden representing the ideal courtly society. It is a place of joy – a garden enclosed whose inhabitants include Delight and Liesse, meaning Jubilation.

The Garden of Joy can be set against the Garden of Woe. Here Gethsemane is an obvious example but there are also many 'poison gardens in literature', a few of which we may mention. The happier side, by contrast, is a matter of pleasure cut off from the pains and dangers of the outside world. Sometimes there is a mix, as in *The Franklin's Tale* where the garden brings both joy and pain. Usually, however, mediaeval gardens are happy places. Here aristocrats indulge in the most refined pleasures of civilised life, singing and dancing, in a context of flowers. The whole thing accords well enough with the Roman idea of the garden as a place of beauty and repose – one where the goddess Flora, bedecked with blossoms, breathes out flowers with every breath.

Nowadays most of us value our gardens as places of peace and tranquillity – and quite often hard work, since the weeds grow faster than the blooms we most cherish. But what is it about gardens that makes them so important to us? Why do all cultures value them? In this study session we shall look at some lovely and interesting garden poetry and also hear something about the history of gardens in real life and literature, from Shakespeare's *Richard 11* to *The Chalk Garden* and from a real-life murder mystery in the paradise island of Floreana to the bliss of in a 'garden enclosed'.

The lecture will be accessible to all and copies of the poems to be discussed are available as an [attachment online](#) or can be posted out on request.

The cost of the lecture is £6 to include refreshments. Everyone is welcome, and no previous knowledge is assumed.

[To book online, please click here](#)

To book by mail, please fill in the booking form below, and mail to BEA, 7 Ravensdowne, Berwick-upon-Tweed TD15 1HX along with a cheque in favour of Berwick Educational Association. If you have any queries, please email berwickea@gmail.com or phone Cian McHugh on 01289 303254

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