

MESTRADO EM ESTUDOS ANGLO-AMERICANOS

The Co-Conspirators: Exploring Utopian Gardens in Emily Dickinson's and Louise Glück's Poetry

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Porto, 30/09/2025

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Resumo

Esta dissertação analisa os jardins de Emily Dickinson e Louise Glück como locais de significado utópico, espacial, cultural e poético. Defendo que, nas suas obras, os jardins possuem simultaneamente qualidades heterotópicas e utópicas que permitem às poetisas reconceptualizar as identidades pessoais, culturais e de género em espaços caracterizados pela imperfeição e pela transformação. Este estudo questiona como as representações de jardins de Emily Dickinson e Louise Glück convergem ou divergem nas suas poéticas espaciais e como reveem noções herdadas de utopia.

A análise situa-se na intersecção entre a teoria espacial, os estudos utópicos e os estudos culturais. Através da noção de heterotopia de Michel Foucault, da obra *A Produção do Espaço*, de Henri Lefebvre, e de "O Conceito de Utopia", de Fátima Vieira, a dissertação explora a reconfiguração da memória cultural do jardim por Dickinson e Glück como um local de experimentação poética. "Dos Jardins", de Bacon, *Poética do Espaço*, de Bachelard, e *A Produção do Espaço*, de Lefebvre, oferecem recursos adicionais para a compreensão do papel dos jardins como locais de culto, reflexão e imaginação. O projeto explora também a herança cultural americana do Jardim do Éden e a figura da Eva americana para investigar como estes mitos influenciaram a desconfiança das mulheres, juntamente com a capacidade de criatividade e a sua relação com o conhecimento e o desejo.

Metodologicamente, a dissertação junta ferramentas das Humanidades Digitais com *close reading*. Foram selecionados poemas relacionados com jardins ou cenários semelhantes a jardins. Através da lematização e do mapeamento de frequência dos verbos de ação na primeira pessoa, a análise computacional revelou padrões de agência nos poemas de jardim de cada poeta. Estas descobertas foram depois cruzadas com *close readings*, garantindo um equilíbrio entre a análise baseada em dados e a análise interpretativa dos textos. Os resultados estatísticos revelaram diferentes disposições verbais em Dickinson e Glück. Por fim, a dissertação identificou um impulso utópico nos seus jardins poéticos através dos elementos de agência e esperança.

Palavras-chave

Emily Dickinson; Louise Glück; jardins; utopia; Humanidades Digitais

Abstract

This dissertation examines the gardens of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück as sites of utopian, spatial, cultural, and poetic significance. It contends that in their work, the gardens have simultaneously heterotopic and utopian qualities that allow for the poets to reconceptualise personal, cultural, and gendered identities in places that are characterized by imperfection and transformation. The study asks how Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück's representations of gardens converge or diverge in their spatial poetics, and how they revise inherited notions of utopia.

At the intersection of spatial theory, utopian studies, and cultural studies lies the analysis. Through Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia, Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space*, and Fátima Vieira's "The Concept of Utopia", the dissertation scrutinizes Dickinson and Glück's reconfiguration of the cultural memory of the garden as a site of poetic experimentation. Bacon's "Of Gardens", Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*, and Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* offer additional resources for comprehending the roles of gardens as sites of cultivation, reflection, and imagination in symbols and semiotics. The project also explores the American cultural inheritance of the Garden of Eden and the figure of the American Eve to investigate how these myths have informed the suspicion, with the capacity for creativity, of women's relation to knowledge and desire.

Methodologically, the dissertation balances digital humanities tools with close reading. Poems were screened to identify those placed in gardens or garden-like settings. Through lemmatization and frequency mapping of first-person action verbs, computational analysis revealed agency patterns in each poet's garden poems. These findings were then brought into conversation with close readings, ensuring a balance of data-informed and interpretive engagement with the texts. The statistical results revealed different verbal dispositions in Dickinson and in Glück. Ultimately, the dissertation identified a utopian impulse in their poetic gardens through the elements of agency and hope.

Keywords

Emily Dickinson; Louise Glück; gardens; utopia; Digital Humanities

Introduction

On October 8, 2020, the American poet and writer Louise Glück was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature, an honor that she extended to yet another great American poet, Emily Dickinson, describing her as a companion in invisibility. In her Nobel Lecture, Glück interpreted Emily Dickinson's poem "I'm nobody! Who are you?" as an expression of private connection or mutual understanding, where the reader becomes a co-conspirator with the author.

Based on this idea of co-conspiracy, we can draw a thin red line, spanning from nineteenth-century Massachusetts to twentieth-century Vermont, connecting them both. Through their work and imagination, these poets also extended that connection of co-conspiracy to countless others who have explored the world through their poetry. The similar themes, such as life and mortality, and the search for definitions of heaven and hell, as well as understanding their place in both concrete and fictional spaces, reveal a shared duality in their vision. However, the connection between their work is more significant than thematic similarities.

Creating the space in the poem where the experiences are shared between the authors and the readers is characteristic of both Dickinson and Glück. Therefore, the act of co-conspiracy is always in the active phase, as their deeply personal poems still allow space for readers to contemplate their own experiences, while remaining in relation to Dickinson and Glück. In both bodies of work, this shared process takes place within a space deeply significant to each poet: the garden.

Certain spaces, regardless of temporal or geographical boundaries, serve as connection points for those who discover them. Having lived apart for a century, Dickinson and Glück found their inspiration through nature, specifically through the art of gardening. Emily Dickinson (1830–1886), who spent much of her life in seclusion, found solace in the privacy of her orchards. Some might even argue that she was first the gardener, and then the poet, as she spent a great deal of her time dedicating herself to understanding the art of gardening. Emily Dickinson studied botany during her time at Amherst Academy and Mount Holyoke Female

Seminary. While in school, she created an impressive herbarium, a collection of over 400 pressed plant specimens, each carefully labelled with its Latin name.



Figure 1. Pages from Emily Dickinson's herbarium. Houghton Library, Harvard University

Although she was largely unpublished during her lifetime —with around ten of her poems published, from the 1,800 she wrote, along with one of her letters —her work would later be recognized as one of the most radical contributions to American poetry.

On the other hand, Louise Glück had a different literary career compared to Dickinson. As she lived in a completely different historical context, Glück managed to be an active writer, publishing fourteen poetry collections, two essay collections, and one novel: *Marigold and Rose: A Fiction*. Glück was famous for her love of gardening, as she dedicated a great deal of her time to cultivating a garden around her house in rural Vermont. She even had a chapbook, *The Garden*, a twelve-page book containing five individual poems. For Louise Glück, the process of gardening was an inspirational source for her poetry. After a prolonged creative silence, it was the physical act of gardening that reignited Glück's writing and led to the

creation of *The Wild Iris*, a collection that went on to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1993. Many of Glück's poetry collections revolve around natural themes, where she is known to personify flowers, trees, and other natural elements. Most of her poems are set in gardens or garden-like spaces, where she is exploring her past, present, and future, her existence as a person, a woman, and a poet.

As Dickinson and Glück shared a common interest in gardening and had a connection with nature, it's no surprise that many of their poems are set in gardens or garden-like spaces. However, it's essential to examine the underlying meaning behind a literal interpretation. The gardens of Dickinson and Glück can stand as a space of union and separation for the poets and their readers. One reason for this is that their garden spaces can differ significantly. The reader's interpretation also adds an element of interpretative difference between the authors. However, these garden spaces are created for the same purpose: to explore and seek personal transformation. Through these attempts, the garden spaces serve two functions: first, as heterotopic, and later, as utopian. The heterotopic functionality of the poetic gardens of Dickinson and Glück comes from their impulse to question and explore the space they occupy in the world, and the utopian impulse comes from the element of hope and agency that is intertwined in these poems.

Additionally, the questions posed for self-exploration by the poets are often similar and engage the same themes. For instance, in these garden poems, Dickinson and Glück frequently engage the religious themes and refer to the Garden of Eden. Yet, unlike the biblical Garden of Eden, a paradise from which humanity was banished for seeking knowledge, Dickinson and Glück's gardens exist in full awareness of imperfection, knowledge, and mortality. To further understand their meaning, this thesis will address the notion of the Garden of Eden in Western history, its relation to the conception of gardens as a whole, and their general role in shaping conceptions about the nature of women in society.

This dissertation further examines the intersections between the utopian gardens introduced by Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück through the lens of spatial poetics, seeking to answer the following research question: How do Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück's representations of gardens converge and diverge in their spatial poetics? To answer this question, the dissertation will provide answers to the following subquestions:

RQ 1: How are gardens represented in the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück, and to what extent can these be read as heterotopic or utopian spaces?

RQ 2: How are the boundaries between nature and culture destabilized or reimagined in Dickinson's and Glück's poetic gardens?

RQ3: In what ways do Dickinson and Glück's poetic gardens reinterpret or challenge the Western tradition of utopian vision?

Although the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück has been a subject of extensive studies that cover diverse fields and modes of interpretation, a comparative analysis addressing their poetry through a utopian and spatial studies framework has not been conducted. Previous studies have examined the relationship between the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück, focusing mainly on thematic parallels. Such comparative studies include "Death—An Invincible Fact of Life: A Comparative Study Between Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück" (2022) by Halim, Tanzina, Rizwana Wahid, and Shanjida Halim, exploring the common theme of mortality between the authors.

At the same time, the idea of "companion in invisibility" between Glück and Dickinson has been addressed by Cheyenne Hunt in "Doing the Heavy Work: Feminism in Louise Glück's Poetry" (2022), where she examines the work of Louise Glück from a feminist perspective, using the example of Dickinson to highlight "the dangers and limitations of hierarchical thinking" (p. 47). Additionally, Hart's 1993 study, "Story-Tellers, Myth-Makers, Truth-Sayers", which examines New England poets, reads Louise Glück as Dickinson's direct heir in "lyric empire of despair and sensation" (p. 192). On the other hand, the symbolic role of the garden in the works of both poets has been explored separately, as seen in studies such as "A Gnostic in the Garden: Myth and Religion in Louise Glück's Poems" (2018) and "Ecological Ethics in Emily Dickinson's Nature Poems" (2021) by Xiang Lingling and Gao Fen.

However, the comparative study of Emily Dickinson's and Louise Glück's poetry from the perspective of spatiality studies and utopian studies has never been proposed before. Likewise, digital humanities methodologies have not been utilized to trace linguistic patterns or to explore their interpretive significance in the poetry of Dickinson and Glück. The

theoretical framework of this dissertation revolves around spatial studies, utopian studies, and poetic studies. It offers a comparative analysis of the poems of Dickinson and Glück, which are centered in the garden or garden-like spaces. To answer the research questions, this dissertation draws on a theoretical framework that combines spatial theory, utopian studies, and cultural memory. For the spatial dimension, Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia, developed in his 1967 lecture "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," and Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* provide the key conceptual tools for examining how Dickinson's and Glück's poetic gardens function as sites that transcend conventional boundaries of time, space, and subjectivity. For the utopian dimension, studies by Fátima Vieira (2010), and Pavla Veselá (2016) inform the analysis of how these gardens operate as spaces of ideality, tension, or critique within the poets' work. To situate the garden as a symbolic and aesthetic construct, the framework also turns to Francis Bacon's 1625 essay "Of Gardens," which reflects an early modern vision of gardens as cultivated sites of beauty, spirituality, and personal exploration. Finally, the garden's role as a "primal home" in cultural imagination—a utopian space inscribed in collective memory—is addressed through Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, which illuminates how the imagery of gardens in Dickinson and Glück resonates with broader Western notions of origin, belonging, and idealized dwelling. Additionally, to explore the significance of Digital Humanities tools and how the data can be analysed, the dissertation explores the studies of Franco Moretti and Joana Drucker.

At the same time, it's vital to reflect on the American cultural and historical background of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück, their realities, and socio-cultural limitations to understand why gardens are such essential spaces in their poetry. For this reason, the dissertation also examines the American historical, cultural, and religious context that shaped gender roles, which are crucial to understanding the identities of both poets; the study analyzes the idea of the American Eve and its utopian function in light of this context.

To identify and select the poems relevant to this study and find patterns suggesting the utopian quality of gardens within these poems, this dissertation combined digital humanities tools with close reading methods. Machine learning made it possible to detect patterns that would have been difficult to identify with the human eye and would otherwise have required a significantly longer research period. Combining digital tools with close reading ensured that no relevant data was lost in the research process, while also guiding the search for utopian

qualities within the selection of the garden poems of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück. The dissertation utilized digital humanities tools to first select the poems, then generate a word cloud to begin analyzing them from a heterotopian perspective, and finally to identify the most frequently used action verbs across the Complete Works of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück.

The combination of machine learning analysis and close reading was designed to generate data-driven insights while also preserving the depth of literary interpretation in the study of gardens in the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück. To pursue this goal, the dissertation is organized into three chapters: *"Into my garden come": The heterotopic gardens of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück*; *American Eves in the Garden: The Utopian Elements in Glück and Dickinson's Revision of Eden*; and *Dickinson and Glück's Utopian Gardens: A Digital Experiment*.

The first chapter—*"Into my garden come": The heterotopic gardens of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück* — establishes the foundation by considering gardens as both cultural and symbolic spaces. It applies theoretical frameworks of spatial, heterotopic, and utopian modes to Dickinson's and Glück's poetry, beginning with a broad overview of gardens in cultural history before narrowing its focus to the symbolic role of gardens within American culture.

The second chapter - *American Eves in the Garden: The Utopian Elements in Glück and Dickinson's Revision of Eden* - turns to the intertwined concept of the American garden and the idea of American Eve. In this chapter, the Garden of Eden is treated as an archetypal blueprint for utopian space, a model whose traces can be found throughout the work of both poets. The discussion follows the ways in which American myths have been shaped by biblical narratives and how these narratives have left a lasting mark on the nation's cultural imagination. By close reading Dickinson's and Glück's poems, the chapter reconsiders the Western utopian ideal of Eden and investigates how gender-specific influences, legible only within their biblical context, inform women's experiences. The analysis proceeds by first identifying biblical themes relevant to the study and then placing Dickinson's and Glück's poetic responses within that narrative, showing how both poets revise and complicate the Western utopian vision. The heterotopic qualities of gardens are central in the chapter,

providing a way to test how the poets transform inherited cultural myths into spaces of reflection and critique.

The third chapter— *Dickinson and Glück's Utopian Gardens: A Digital Experiment*— shifts to the results retrieved from the digital humanities analysis, which isolates verbs of agency in poems set in gardens or in garden-like spaces. For the dissertation, the use of digital humanities tools was inspired by the studies that I previously conducted with the FCT scholarship for CETAPS, the Centre for English, Translation, and Anglo-American Studies of the Universities of Porto and Nova/Lisbon where the R programming language was used to identify specific themes and patterns across diverse utopian narratives. A similar method was used to explore the utopian impulse in a specific selection of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück poems. Resorting to R language, the study identifies the most frequently used action verbs across the poems of Dickinson and Glück. Later, by linking these results to the utopian impulses in their gardens, the chapter reveals how agency itself is articulated through poetic language. The final chapter addresses whether Dickinson's and Glück's gardens function primarily as utopian spaces and, if so, how.

As gardens are recurring central spaces in the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück, there was a variety of poems that could have been used for this study. In Glück's case, many poems—particularly from her collection *The Wild Iris*—do not explicitly mention “garden” or “orchard,” yet the setting is unmistakably that of a garden-like space. For the final selection of poems, this study employed a mixed method of combining distant and close reading. Using digital humanities techniques with the R programming language, poems explicitly containing the term “garden” were first identified. The same script also filtered for references to objects and subjects typically associated with garden spaces across the complete works of both poets, producing a broad corpus of garden-related poems. From this corpus, close reading was then applied to select those poems most relevant to the research questions. A detailed description of the process can be found in Chapter 3.

Before moving to comparative reading, it's essential to understand why gardens became poetic and cultural symbols of high significance. It is necessary first to explore the historical and cultural contexts in which gardens evolved as spaces of substance, and later see how and why they became recurring spaces in the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück.

Chapter I

"Into my garden come": The heterotopic gardens of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück

How is your garden, Mary? Are the Pinks true –and the
Sweet Williams, faithful? I've got a Geranium –like a
Sultana –and when the Humming birds come down –
Geranium and I shut our eyes –and go far away –

Emily Dickinson, Letter 302

*Whatever you hoped,
you will not find yourselves in the garden,
among the growing plants.
Your lives are not circular like theirs:*

*your lives are the bird's flight
which begins and ends in stillness—
which begins and ends, in form echoing
this arc from the white birch
to the apple tree.*

Louise Glück, "Retreating Wind"

Gardens serve many purposes, ranging from cultural icons to mirroring personal and political ideologies to the narratives of myths and symbols, which have multiple meanings behind them. The cultural background and spatial exploration of gardens provide an explanation of why and how these spaces come into being; however, what happens when poets turn their attention to the garden and turn the symbol into a fictional space in their poetry? In the works of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück, gardens emerge as recurring spaces, where both poets engage in self-exploration, examining their realities and the issues they face individually.

It's no coincidence that Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück used gardens as recurring spaces in their poetry. Although writing for more than a century apart, they shared a love of nature and gardening, as well as a distinctively American cultural tradition that symbolically understood the garden, and America itself, as an earthly Eden. But understanding both the poetic and symbolic dimensions of these gardens involves first understanding the purposes for which they were created, with a view to their cultural and spatial significance.

Throughout history, gardens have mirrored how cultures comprehend and structure relationships with the natural world. The concept of taming nature is as old as civilization, and the garden, along with every other human-made space, is created and designed to illustrate the effects of human vision, memory, labor, and ideology. Gardens are places where opposites such as growth and decay, freedom and control, the cultivated and the wild come together. As Elena Micoulina points out, gardens are reflections of how people have related to their environment at different stages in history. Each garden holds what she calls an "image," a visual and spatial expression of cultural attitudes toward nature (Micoulina, 1988, p. 71)¹. Cooper (2017) even goes so far as to say that a garden can serve as "a distillation of the universe," helping people understand not just nature but their place within it (p. 3). However, perhaps one of the most interesting ways of thinking about garden spaces was presented by English philosopher Francis Bacon in his 1625 essay "Of Gardens".

Bacon's vision synthesizes the classical ambition to structure nature and the early modern fascination with its complexity. In doing so, he positions the garden as a distinctly human project, neither wholly artificial nor wholly natural, but something in between. Although his essay carries a substantial descriptive and instructional value on how to create an English

¹ There are as many gardens as there are cultures, as a garden is a space which always reflects the worldview of the culture that has produced it. For example, the strict symmetry of the Persian Chahar Bagh shows an ideal of divine order, while the Japanese Zen garden's openness to time shows a way of looking at the world that is open to change and self-reflection. The Baroque garden, on the other hand, was meant to reflect political and economic power. The long, straight lines and perfect shapes of Versailles were a political statement. This turned the garden into what Micoulina calls a "focal point" of authority and spectacle (Micoulina, 1988, p. 76).

On the other hand, in East Asian cultures, especially in Japan, gardens often don't follow this logic. Leaving fallen leaves on stone paths or stopping to watch flowers bloom for a short time are examples of a very different way of thinking, concentrating on seeing beauty in things that don't last and finding harmony not in dominance but in attunement. This aesthetic is deeply rooted in Buddhist philosophy, which sees change and loss as a natural part of life rather than things to be overcome (Cooper, 2017, p.5).

garden, it also offers a perspective on understanding gardens as cultural forms. For Bacon, the garden, along with the aesthetic element, was the way of thinking and of being in the world. He draws the garden as a microcosm of the world. "God Almighty first planted a garden," Bacon writes, "and indeed it is the purest of human pleasures" (Bacon, 1625/1906, p. 149). The essay ascribed two functions to the garden: first, strictly aesthetic, created for leisure and pleasure, and second, a spiritual/intellectual ideal. He insisted that "gardening is the greater perfection" even when compared to architecture or other grand artistic acts (p. 149), suggesting that the manipulation of living materials carries a higher philosophical weight than the construction of stone or wood.

While his essay provides a profound consideration of the aesthetic virtues of gardens, never quite in Bacon's garden could this be rendered merely aesthetic. His essay provides a detailed guide on creating a perfect garden, offering a comprehensive description of spatial layouts and the sensory pleasures that can be experienced or incorporated into the garden. But underlying this practical detail is a consistent philosophical tension between wildness and order. Bacon advised that the garden should allow for "natural wildness," especially in the outer areas, or "heath," filled with violets, strawberries, and thickets of sweet-briar and honeysuckle (p. 153). Yet he also cautioned against overly "busy" or artificial designs, such as topiary animals or intricate knots, which he dismisses as "toys" and "for children" (p. 151). What he advocated instead was a carefully curated spontaneity, a nature guided, not dominated, by the human hand. This tension between control and freedom anticipates later theories about the garden as a site of dialectical negotiation between nature and culture. David E. Cooper (2017), for instance, describes the garden as a space where "our respective experiences of nature and cultural practice mutually inflect one another" (p. 11).

Bacon's essay embodies this interplay. His garden includes "alleys... for shelter," "mounts" for vistas, and "fountains" that must always be in motion lest they decay (Bacon, 1625/1906, pp. 151–152). Moreover, "Of Gardens" is not only about the garden itself, but about the kind of life one might live within it. Bacon envisions it as a space of "refreshment to the spirits," a retreat from the burdens of court or city life (p. 149). The garden's pleasures are sensual "the breath of flowers . . . like the warbling of music" (p. 150), but also intellectual and restorative. This process of taming nature brings humans closer to their origins, as all life started in the wild and unpredictable environments.

When speaking about the gardens, Bacon states that “it is the greatest refreshment to the spirits of man; without which, buildings and palaces are but gross handiworks; and a man shall ever see, that when ages grow to civility and elegancy, men come to build stately sooner than to garden finely; as if gardening were the greater perfection”(Bacon, 1625/1906, p.149). However, when studying the poetic gardens of Glück and Dickinson, contrasts between the perfect order and poetic visions collide, as these gardens are not necessarily sources of great spiritual refreshment in a traditional sense. In this case, it’s important to note that Bacon, when writing about gardens, is speaking of actual spaces, not fictitious ones. Therefore, the perception and functionality of such spaces are naturally different from those that are products of personal imaginations and are never materialized.

However, one detail that is explored in Bacon's essay, as well as throughout the poetry of both Dickinson and Glück, is that a garden, in itself, is an expression of human resistance in various forms, whether in response to labor expectations or gender roles. At its core, however, it mirrors the most fundamental resistance of all: the human desire to tame nature. While gardens are often described as natural spaces, they are, in fact, artificial productions, shaped, structured, and maintained through human intervention. As Robert T. Tally Jr. puts it, “nature cannot produce; it can only create” (Tally, 2013, p. 116). Nature creates in a spontaneous, organic, and often chaotic way, whereas humans produce spaces deliberately, with intention and design. A garden, therefore, is a manifestation of how people make meaning out of landscape by organising it into something comprehensible, usable, or beautiful. It is the spatial expression of a will to transform chaos into coherence. Tally’s framework, which draws heavily on Henri Lefebvre’s spatial theory, provides an essential lens through which to understand the garden not just as an aesthetic space, but also as a social and cultural construct. Gardens reveal themselves to be “socially produced and ideologically charged” spaces (Tally, 2013, p. 117). The decision to include a particular type of tree, to shape hedges a certain way, to separate leisure from labour, all participate in a broader spatial logic that is directly tied to class, gender, aesthetics, and power. In this sense, the garden is a clear example of what Tally calls “the ideological nature of spatial representation,” a space that reflects and reinforces particular views of the world (p. 117). With human intervention and desire to produce space, the garden’s apparent freedom always becomes curated, and the experience of “nature” within it is never untouched by culture. Tally writes that “we are not

simply in space; we are of it, and we produce it as much as it produces us” (Tally, 2013, p. 141). However, to understand the spatial significance of gardens, one must first approach them in the fullest Lefebvrian sense.

Henri Lefebvre dismantles the illusion that space is merely physical or geometric. Instead, he asserts that “(social) space is a (social) product” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 26). To explore the significance and the meaning behind different types of spaces, he introduces a conceptual triad: *spatial practice (perceived space)*, *representations of space (conceived space)*, and *representational space (lived space)* (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33), which provides a method for understanding the complex processes through which space is generated and maintained. Gardens have a unique and special position within this scheme. As *perceived space*, a garden is an arrangement of paths, beds, hedges, and fences, it is walked through, worked in, smelled, touched, and maintained. It is a site of spatial routine: the act of planting and watering. As *conceived space*, it is mapped, designed, and theorised by landscape architects, philosophers like Bacon, or political figures such as Louis XIV, who used gardens to symbolise rational and political control. Ultimately, as a *lived space*, the garden assumes poetic and symbolic significance. It can represent a space of memory, exploration/contemplation, and desire. The gardens of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück need to be analyzed mostly from the perspective of lived spaces. A lived space is not only a “space experienced” but a symbolic and embodied space shaped by social practices, memories, and imagination. The poetic gardens created by Dickinson and Glück carry the results of these elements. There has been a historical connection between gardens and women, which developed out of social and cultural traditions that treated women and plants in similar ways, as decorative, quiet, and under the control of men. During the Enlightenment, this way of thinking only grew stronger. Scientific classification, which separated “reason” from “nature,” aligned men with the first and pushed women into the second (McLeod, 2015, para. 3). But memory and imagination are present, and strongly represented in the gardens of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück. A look into the action verbs they use throughout their poetry, especially in the poems where a garden or a garden-like space is the main setting, helps to elucidate this subject.

This function, however, is closely tied to the qualities of heterotopia that Michel Foucault outlined in his 1967 lecture "Of Other Spaces." If we read the gardens of Dickinson and Glück as representational spaces, they can also be understood as heterotopic spaces. This definition matters for spatial analysis because it is precisely the heterotopic character of these gardens that allows them to take on a utopian function. In the case of Dickinson and Glück's gardens, the space is first constructed in the poet's consciousness, then carried onto the page, and finally given form outside the self. Once written, this space can be visited by anyone who reads the poems, and through that act of reading and the further expansion it undergoes in the minds of readers, these gardens become heterotopias.

According to Foucault, heterotopias emerge from the foundational structures of society. Yet, they are "absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about" (p. 24). They are constituted through a network of spatial relations that give them meaning, including proximity, accessibility, symbolic associations, and the cultural codes that determine their use. Foucault defines heterotopias as "counter-sites," real locations that are "something like counter-arrangements" to dominant cultural norms (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). Heterotopic spaces challenge spatial conventions by accommodating paradoxes: "They juxtapose in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault, 1986, p. 25).²

Foucault offers six principles for identifying and describing heterotopias: universality, mutability, juxtaposition of incompatible spaces, link to heterochronies, systems of opening and closing, and function in relation to other spaces. Heterotopias exist in every culture but take diverse forms (p. 24). In "primitive" societies, they appear as crisis heterotopias, sacred or secluded spaces for those in transitional states. At the same time, in modernity, they tend to be heterotopias of deviation, designated for individuals whose behavior falls outside societal norms (p. 24). At the same time, the same heterotopia can change its function over time, as with cemeteries, which moved from city centers to suburban outskirts when cultural attitudes toward death shifted in the 19th century (p. 25).

² Foucault identifies the garden as one of the earliest heterotopias, noting how in Persian culture it functioned as a "microcosm" of the universe: "a sort of sacred space that was supposed to bring together inside its rectangle four parts representing the four corners of the world" (Foucault, 1986, p. 26).

Heterotopias are also constructed to juxtapose incompatible spaces, such as theaters and cinemas that bring multiple sites together in one (p. 25). They are linked to slices of time, or “heterochronies,” functioning at moments of temporal rupture, such as the cemetery’s association with death and eternity, or the museum’s accumulation of all historical time in a single location (pp. 25–26). Their construction includes mechanisms of opening and closing, which regulate access through rules, rites, or hidden exclusions (p. 26).

As described by Foucault, “the garden is the smallest parcel of the world, and then it is the totality of the world. The garden has been a sort of happy, universalizing heterotopia since the beginnings of antiquity (our modern zoological gardens spring from that source).” (Foucault, 1967, p. 6). In light of these six principles, gardens are universal in every culture, mutable across history, juxtaposing incompatible spaces (labor/leisure), linked to heterochronies of seasonal growth and decay, ruled by rituals of entry and care, and functioning simultaneously as a space of illusion and compensation, a microcosm of the world.

Heterotopias perform two primary functions concerning the rest of space: they either create spaces of illusion or spaces of compensation (p. 27). In the first case, they expose the unreality of “real” spaces by highlighting their constructed nature. In the second case, they offer an alternative spatial order, meticulously organized to contrast with the disorder of ordinary life, such as the Jesuit colonies in Paraguay, whose layout, daily schedule, and rituals formed a perfect, theocratic “other place” (p. 27). Heterotopias are significant because they reveal that space is neither neutral nor homogeneous; rather, it is a complex and multifaceted entity. They challenge the unexamined divisions, like private/public, leisure/work, sacred/profane, that still structure modern life (p. 23). By representing, inverting, and contesting these divisions, the poetic gardens of Dickinson and Glück destabilize spatial norms and make visible the cultural logics that sustain them, by existing as spaces that allow the contemplation of memory, identity, and future. Moreover, these gardens, as other heterotopias, offer a way to think about how the poets situate themselves in relation to others, to the past, and imagined alternatives.

Unlike utopias, which derive from the Greek *ou* (“not” or “no”) and *topos* (“place”) to signify “no place” or “nowhere”, the purpose of heterotopic space lies in its capacity to “suspect,

neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (Foucault, 1967, p. 24)³. That is to say, a heterotopic space interrogates the foundations of social order by displacing them into different spatial arrangements. Among the key functions of heterotopias is their ability to bring together multiple temporalities: they are “linked to slices in time,” such as cemeteries that “begin with the forever” or libraries and museums that accumulate time by collecting objects, texts, and traces of the past (Foucault, 1986, p. 26). This function is particularly resonant with the poetic gardens of Dickinson and Glück, where time is never linear. In their poetry, the garden becomes a heterotopia precisely because it operates within multiple registers of time and meaning at once; it is both a space of intimate daily practice and of exploration and transformation, which collapses memory, longing, and questioning, which later enables the utopian function to enter the site.

When analysing the gardens of Dickinson and Glück as heterotopic spaces, it is essential to make one distinction: according to Foucault, heterotopic spaces are real and tangible; however, after analysing how the gardens of Dickinson and Glück function, it is possible to state that fictional spaces can have a heterotopic quality. When Foucault states that heterotopias are “real places” (p. 24), “real” in this framework can refer not necessarily to empirical geography but to actualized relations within a system of spaces. A fictional site can fulfil the same function if it reflects, contests, or inverts the spaces outside the text and operates according to its own spatial and temporal logic. In literature and poetry, the text, or a space described in text, can become a heterotopic site, and the act of reading becomes the ritualized entry, a “system of opening and closing” (p. 26) that separates the reader from ordinary space. Once inside, the fictional world engages with “all the space that remains” (p. 27), shaping the reader’s perception of reality. The result is a heterotopia of the mind: not physically locatable, yet spatially operative. While readers cannot physically step into these gardens, they function heterotopically because they operate in deliberate opposition to the societal spaces they mirror.

³ While this dissertation employs Foucault’s formulation, it is important to note that subsequent scholars have reinterpreted and expanded the term. For example, Kevin Hetherington, in *The Badlands of Modernity* (1997), emphasizes heterotopia as spaces of alternative social ordering and resistance within modernity, while Edward Soja (*Thirdspace*, 1996) situates it within a broader framework of spatial justice. Others, such as Peter Johnson (2006), have debated the ambiguity and applicability of the concept in cultural and literary studies. Although these perspectives provide valuable insights, the analysis here relies primarily on Foucault’s original definition of heterotopia as a counter-site that mirrors, contests, or inverts other spaces.

The concept of utopia, as Fátima Vieira explains, is not static but historically dynamic, beginning with Thomas More's coinage in 1516, which fused *ou* ("not") and *topos* ("place") to suggest at once "no-place" and, through its punning overlap with eutopia, "good place" (Vieira, 2010, pp. 3–5). While visions of ideal societies existed in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, More's *Utopia* gave the idea a new modern form that straddled fiction and critique, inaugurating a tradition in which alternative worlds could be used to expose the flaws of the present (Vieira, 2010, pp. 4–8). Vieira stresses that utopia is best understood less as a fixed genre than as an attitude—an expression of dissatisfaction with the present combined with a desire for change, animated by hope as its principal energy (Vieira, 2010, pp. 6–7). Early utopias were mainly spatial, describing distant islands where social harmony appeared as a model, but by the late eighteenth century, the emphasis shifted from space to time, producing what Vieira calls "euchronia": a utopia projected into the future, shaped by Enlightenment optimism about reason and progress (Vieira, 2010, pp. 9–12). This move opened the way for nineteenth-century experiments, from utopian socialism to Marxist thought, which reframed utopia not as a static blueprint but as an outcome of historical processes (Vieira, 2010, pp. 12–15). At the same time, dystopias and anti-utopias emerged, inverting utopia's devices to warn against social or technological excess, yet even these critical visions carried a didactic and often hopeful function, offering a glimpse of alternatives within their critique (Vieira, 2010, pp. 15–18). Contemporary utopianism is pragmatic, micro-level, and processual, functioning less as a closed model than as a strategy to establish "horizons of expectation" and catalyze gradual change (Vieira, 2010, pp. 21–23). Levitas (2011) suggests that the utopian method requires "a provisional, critical estrangement from the present" (p. 4), which is precisely what the gardens of Dickinson and Glück provide. When the poet and reader enter a space where time runs differently and familiar meanings shift, they can see the world from a new angle. In this space, hope is what moves reality forward.

Through the gardens found in the poetry of Dickinson and Glück, readers can explore the spaces that are always open for the introspective visitors, who have the power to insert themselves into the parallel reality of the fictional space, and thus give it the utopian element of hope. This is particularly important from a feminist perspective, as the fact that a woman can write, read, and share this union as a collective is a political act, as women represent a social class that has been deprived of such privileges for centuries. Dickinson herself, whose

work was only adequately published after her death, never enjoyed the same success and recognition during her life as did Glück.

Although they were writing in very different contexts and times, Glück and Dickinson explored similar themes in their poetry, such as mortality, identity, nature, and religion. In addition, they shared a similar social background: both poets were women, living in a patriarchal society, where gender expectations dictated the attitude of society toward women. But also, based on their biographies, it's visible that both poets shared a sense of alienation from the world that surrounded them. This may have led both poets to create a fictional space in their poetry, such as gardens, that would allow them to ask questions that couldn't be voiced and understood in their realities.

The world knows Louise Glück as an accomplished poet. Although she had a brilliant career, the other side of her life was marked by various challenges, starting from an early life eating disorder to the sense of alienation from her own son, and family. She always found the way to understand and cope with her reality by connecting herself to nature and immersing herself within. In her biography, Glück had commented on the significance of gardens in her personal life. In the poems that followed, Glück gave voice to the very plants she tended, most notably in the title poem "Wild Iris", where a flower speaks from the point between death and renewal (Higgins, 2020). This intimate dialogue between poet and garden reflects Glück's own view of poetry as a solitary, private communion, an idea she attributes in part to her long-standing connection with Emily Dickinson. At the same time, reading through Glück's biography, it's noticeable how significant the garden space was for her, as she speaks about gardens among some of the most essential and also routine memories of her past, as she cites: "When Noah (her son) was just shy of two, I met the man I would marry. Years passed. We bought a house in the country; the house burned down. We bought another house, back in the village. Books were written, and a few prizes won. We made a small *garden*, then a bigger *garden*" (Glück, 2020). Gardening became a big part of her life, and was an integral part of her routine: "Long periods of silence. After the disputed *Ararat*, a brutal punitive blankness. I cooked. Two years. I read *garden catalogs* and listened to Don Giovanni" (Louise Glück, 2020).



Figure 3. A view of Glück's Garden in Vermont. Louise Glück Biographical.

Throughout the years, the poet's life underwent significant changes, marked by active periods in her personal life and career, as well as quiet, solitary episodes, similar to those of Dickinson herself. For Glück, the alienation from her world started from the beginning of her life, as she spent years in the shadow of her parents' grief for her sister, who passed away before Glück's birth. This alienation inspired by temporality was a significant influence on the poet and her poetry. For instance, her collection *Ararat* features poems that reflect on the death of her infant sister, tensions with another sibling, the loss of her father, and her mother's responses to these tragedies. *Ararat* also explores her own experiences of parenthood and the challenges of forming a bond with her child (Alwash & Saeed, 2022, p. 998).

Dickinson's alienation had different reasons. First and foremost, Emily Dickinson was a woman in 19th-century Massachusetts who possessed a talent that was not typically expected of women in a society characterized by its conservative, patriarchal values. Now recognised as one of the greatest American poets, Dickinson was far from this recognition in her lifetime. While she primarily shared her work through personal correspondence, after her

death, editors helped bring her poetry to a broader audience through publishing volumes of her works (Smith, 2002, p. 55). Emily Dickinson passed away in 1886, and four years later, in 1890, her poetry was first published as *Poems by Emily Dickinson*, edited by Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson. As stated by Jiangyue (2015), to understand Dickinson's perspective it is essential to consider her identity. One of the main reasons for her alienation from her society was the choices that she made. Dickinson was a woman who chose never to marry, which was considered one of the most significant social roles a woman could have in 19th-century Massachusetts. She, just like Glück, found comfort and inspiration in the garden of her home and in her writing. Dickinson herself once shared with her cousin Louise Norcross, "I was reared in the garden (Emily Dickinson, 1859, L206). "



Figure 3. A view from Dickinson's Gardens. Emily Dickinson Museum.

According to the Emily Dickinson Museum (n.d.), Dickinson began assembling a herbarium as a teenager, which eventually held over 400 plant specimens, each labeled with its Latin name in her careful handwriting. From a young age, Dickinson approached plants and nature with unique intuition. Her education at Amherst Academy and Mount Holyoke Female Seminary included formal botanical study, but her practice didn't stay confined in the classroom:

Dickinson maintained an extensive indoor conservatory, added to the Homestead by her father in 1855, which housed delicate species such as her mother's Greville rose, heliotropes, fuchsias, and gardenias (Emily Dickinson Museum, n.d.). In the nineteenth century, a well-maintained garden symbolized the sense of education and refinement among upper-class women. Those who received her poems and letters recognized her literary talent, and among these figures, she was considered an exceptional poet. However, as an unmarried woman mainly confined to her home, literary ability alone was not always sufficient for social recognition. Dickinson preferred a natural style of gardens, incorporating wildflowers and avoiding features such as ornamental trees or artificial structures. Her gardens had a profound influence on her writing, as themes of love, death, and religion frequently appeared in her poetic garden spaces (Jiangyue, 2015, pp.71-72). This connection between the poet and nature is vivid throughout her poems and letters.

However, it's important to highlight that these garden spaces for Dickinson and Glück are not created only because of their sense of alienation. Alienation is only a motivator. As the verbs identified by the wordcloud in Figure 2 show, it becomes visible that Dickinson and Glück create these spaces to invite knowledge, claim the past, analyse the present by seeing, hearing, noticing, and learning, while reimagining the future by growing, dreaming, and telling their stories, and sharing their perspectives. These perspectives are related to them as poets, as women, and as individuals living in a world that is shaped by the historical and religious narratives. In these dynamics, Dickinson and Glück question their reality and the expectations that are imposed upon them. For Dickinson and Glück, the garden is imagined as existing in parallel to the real world, a place where they can reflect on their presence within it. Thus, a fictional space is produced that links them to one another and to their readers, who in turn continue the practice as they participate in the experience through reading.

Although the nature of the garden differs between Dickinson and Glück and will inevitably be interpreted differently by each reader, the shared quality of these gardens is that they always emerge as transformational lived spaces. This function becomes evident when studying the poems where the garden serves as the primary site of action.

Sabina Ostrowska notes that In Dickinson's case, "the Garden enables her to meditate and experience mystical ecstasy. Eventually, it functions as an emblem of Emily Dickinson — a

female artist, who is a *hortus conclusus*⁴ herself” (Ostrowska, 1999, p.89). The letter quoted in the epigraph reasserts this idea: both the flower and the speaker close their eyes in the garden “ –and go far away –”. Similar to Dickinson, Glück’s poetic garden is a site of ontological uncertainty, while it also operates within a socio-political matrix of feminist critique. Wyman (2020) argues that Glück utilized the garden to subvert patriarchal representations of nature and femininity. In Glück’s poetry, the feminine is not passively aligned with nature, nor idealized through maternal or erotic metaphors; instead, it is rendered in flux, at times spectral, at others agentic, and always embedded in structures of loss, control, and resistance (Wyman, 2020, p. 137). This is an uniting motive with Dickinson, who invites “the feeling of Loss, Death, Pain, and broadens the space of her Garden and makes it less idealistic and more human”(Ostrowska, 1999, p.89). Moreover, the use of “I” in Glück’s garden poems is frequently destabilized, replaced with impersonal pronouns or distributed among non-human agents. In “The Garden”, for instance, a sequence from *Descending Figure*, the speaker refers to the plant world with disorienting intimacy and alienation: “the least shrub that walks / stiffly out of the dirt, trailing / the twisted signature of its root, / even to a tulip, a red claw” (as cited in Wyman, 2020, p. 139).

At the same time, it’s important to note who the speaker is addressing and how. Usually, when in the poetic garden, the speaker addresses either a “lady” or a male figure, who is either God, a son, a brother or a husband. The example can be found in Glück’s “Witchgrass”, from *The Wild Iris*. At the center of the poem is the speaker, who is questioning the reality within the garden. There is a big sense of estrangement between the speaker and the figure she addresses:

WITCHGRASS

Something
comes into the world unwelcome
calling disorder, disorder—
If you hate me so much
don’t bother to give me
a name: do you need
one more slur
in your language, another

⁴ *Hortus Conclusus* is Latin for closed garden.

way to blame
one tribe for everything—
as we both know,
if you worship
one god, you only need
one enemy—
I'm not the enemy.
Only a ruse to ignore
what you see happening
right here in this bed,
a little paradigm
of failure. One of your precious flowers
dies here almost every day
and you can't rest until
you attack the cause, meaning
whatever is left, whatever
happens to be sturdier
than your personal passion—
It was not meant
to last forever in the real world.
But why admit that, when you can go on
doing what you always do,
mourning and laying blame,
always the two together.
I don't need your praise
to survive. I was here first,
before you were here, before
you ever planted a garden.
And I'll be here when only the sun and moon
are left, and the sea, and the wide field.
I will constitute the field.

(Glück, 2022, p. 265)

This space in the poem is defined by this tension as the speaker asks: "If you hate me so much/don't bother to give me/ a name" (Glück, 2022, p. 265). Here the garden serves as the space that holds this conversation. A reply may never come, since the figure addressed never fully materializes, yet the purpose extends beyond this response. Even within this imagined setting, created to test the boundaries of her reality, the pressure of external forces on the speaker's identity remains clear. She reflects on herself as a body situated in a larger social order, as a woman positioned within the world. These roles, which are gendered and socially bind individuals to places and expectations, prescribe how they should act and where they belong. The garden thus becomes essential, not only as a site to confront the terms of her categorization, but also as a space in which to question, resist, and act upon that imposed

position. However, at the end of the poem, the speaker declares agency as it ends with the statement: "I don't need your praise /to survive. I was here first,/before you were here, before/ you ever planted a garden./And I'll be here when only the sun and moon/Are left, and the sea, and the wide field.// I will constitute the field" (Glück, 2022, p. 265).

Yet another example of the garden as a lived space in Glück's poetry appears in "The Jacob's Ladder", also from *The Wild Iris*:

THE JACOB'S LADDER

Trapped in the earth,
wouldn't you too want to go
to heaven? I live
in a lady's garden. Forgive me, lady;
longing has taken my grace. I am
not what you wanted. But
as men and women seem
to desire each other, I too desire
knowledge of paradise - and now
your grief, a naked stem
reaching the porch window.
And at the end, what? A small blue flower
like a star. Never
to leave the world! Is this
not what your tears mean?

(Glück, 2022, p. 266)

Lefebvre's concept of lived space allows for the reading of the garden not as a simple setting, but as an emotionally and culturally constructed environment, where longing, guilt, and memory are spatialized in the garden described in "The Jacob's Ladder"⁵. Additionally, it's important to highlight that in the poem, Glück draws a comparison to "Heaven", which could be a direct indication of a longing for the original idea of paradise, the Garden of Eden, which in the Western collective memory is remembered as the original point of humankind that was forever lost. In the light of this memory, just as Glück, Western culture as a whole longs for

⁵ In Genesis 28:10–19, the story of Jacob's Ladder recounts a dream in which Jacob sees a stairway or ladder linking earth and heaven, with angels moving up and down upon it. During his flight from his brother Esau, Jacob stops to rest and receives this vision, in which God reaffirms the covenant made with Abraham and Isaac and promises Jacob continual presence, protection, and a future for his descendants.

the idealized, exaggerated idea of perfection. But in this case, Glück is experiencing the sense of entrapment because she places herself in the “lady’s garden”. The word “lady” is the most significant indicator of why she is in this garden in the first place; the garden exists for the lady, because of her gender, for her to turn this imaginary place into a lived space, and transform her understanding of self-awareness. Here, too, the garden exists to question one’s reality, but in this case, it is compared to the Garden of Eden, which is one of the earliest utopian ideals. However, in contrast to the perfect, ideal mythical Garden of Eden, Glück, in this poem, invites human emotions such as grief and the desire for knowledge. Although she is asking to know paradise, this request could be read in diverse ways, most importantly as the knowledge of self, and the beginning of one’s existence for one goal: to understand how and why humanity came to being as such.

As Glück develops the idea of a “lady’s garden” in “The Jacob’s Ladder”, Dickinson also develops a similar perspective of an “unexpected Maid”, in “Baffled for just a day or two” (J17), a poem written around 1858:

Baffled for just a day or two –
Embarrassed – not afraid –
Encounter in my garden
An unexpected Maid.

She beckons, and the woods start –
She nods, and all begin –
Surely, such a country
I was never in!

In this poem, the garden, similar to Glück’s garden spaces, stands as a threshold, marking the boundary between the familiar and the unfamiliar, between self and other. The “unexpected Maid”, a stranger who enters the most intimate, private space of a poet, can either be a total stranger or an extension of her subconscious. The moment is not rooted in realism, but in the surreal logic of lived space, where internal experience takes spatial form. Like Glück, Dickinson portrays the garden as a space where emotional, perceptual, and symbolic layers merge, creating a fictional setting that nonetheless feels lived in and operative.

However, these are not singular examples where the garden stands as a space existing in parallel with reality. In Glück's "Song", the reality is explored and transformed from the perspective of an external spectator:

. . .

But John
objects, he thinks
if this were not a poem but
an actual garden, then
the red rose would be
required to resemble
nothing else, neither
another flower nor
the shadowy heart, at
earth level pushing
half maroon, half crimson.

(Glück, 2022, p. 269)

In this poem, Glück still stumbles upon the sense of alienation, as she introduces the figure of her former husband, John Dranow, who, according to the poem, misunderstands her vision profoundly. The uniting aspects of these poems are that they are all echoes of Glück's life in her world, where there was not much space for her to express and explore her reality, and even her work as a poet was often inspired by the solitary activity of being in the garden away from the gaze of others who could only misunderstand.

On the other hand, Dickinson also proposes the garden as a similar example of a lived space. Although her depictions of gardens differ from Glück's, this similarity between the lived spaces remains present. Just like Glück, Dickinson⁶ also incorporates an immense amount of symbolism into her poetic gardens, using the garden as a space where she reflects and longs for. An example of such a case can be found in her poem "There is another sky" (J2), written around 1851⁷:

⁶ All references to Dickinson's poems are taken from Thomas H. Johnson's edition of *The Complete Poems* (Faber and Faber), hereafter referred to with the letter J, followed by the number of the poem. This edition was chosen because it includes subject indexes that were very useful for the selection of the poems and the Digital Humanities project.

⁷ As an example of her early work, this poem shows how Dickinson was writing about gardens from the very beginning of her poetic work.

...

Here is a brighter garden,
Where not a frost has been;
In its unfading flowers
I hear the brighter hum;
Prithee, my brother,
Into *my* garden come!

In this poem, the garden is depicted in such a way that it resembles an Edenic ideal. The invitation to the “brother” to enter the speaker’s garden is, however, spatially transformative. Dickinson’s speaker has created a place that holds emotional warmth and permanence, a place to inhabit beyond the material world. The emphasis on the word “my” may be Dickinson’s way of establishing agency while asserting that everything experienced in the garden belongs solely to her, that the space exists for her, and because of her. As Sabina Ostrowska argues, Dickinson’s Garden functions on multiple levels: as a retreat from societal norms, a locus of mystical contemplation, and a metapoetic structure representing her own creative autonomy (Ostrowska, 1999, p. 88).

Dickinson’s poetic garden space is closely connected to her actual garden at home too. She closed herself off from the expectations of Victorian femininity, refusing the roles of wife and mother in order to reincarnate as what Ostrowska calls “Woman-White, mystical Nobody”, a poet who exists outside social definition yet contains multitudes (p. 90). Although Dickinson drew on the longstanding trope that links women to gardens, she reclaimed the imagery through a “mystical variant,” using the Garden not as a site of domesticity but as one of metaphysical inquiry and personal transcendence (p. 93). In this sense, her orchard, which later found its way into her poetry, often mirrors the biblical Eden (just like in the poetry of Glück) but detaches itself from its patriarchal frame: she rewrites it as her own sanctuary of freedom, resistance, and self-knowledge. This practice has connections with the Christian tradition of Christ’s Agony in the Garden, an experience of spiritual testing and divine intimacy, which Dickinson transforms into a female ritual of self-invention and transformation. As Ostrowska states, “closed in the Garden, a place of both contemplation and imprisonment, the poet concentrates on minor objects, sounds, images,” and through this, “she goes through the levels of mystical contemplation, which allows her to touch the Absolute” (p. 90).

When it comes to the creation of the fictional gardens in the poetry of Glück and Dickinson, one might argue about how deliberate the process is and whether they are created with intention and design. One unifying aspect of their garden poems is that they invite chaos. In the process of taming nature into what Bacon calls a “decent order,” it’s impossible to avoid interaction with not-so-aesthetic practices, such as the beginning of cultivation, planting, decorating, and also killing unnecessary plants. Chaos is mitigated to create beauty in the garden, but only in the tangible space. On the other hand, when recalling mythical garden spaces, such as the Garden of Eden, it’s important to note that such a space is devoid of any types of chaos or challenges for its inhabitants. But, when discussing the fictional poetic gardens, they are not *products* of the mind, but the *creations* of the minds of the poets, as similar to the process of nature creating its order, so are Dickinson and Glück, whose gardens thrive in chaos, and embrace all the possible, layers of life, including the ones that have no aesthetic quality to it, such as grief and death. In the poem “Thanksgiving”, from *Descending Figure*, Glück creates an ode to such a mode of existence, only possible through embracing chaos, chaotic only for a human, but never chaotic for nature:

THANKSGIVING

They have come again to gaze the orchard,
knowing they will be denied.
The leaves have fallen; on the dry ground
the wind makes piles of them, sorting
all it destroys.

What does not move, the snow will cover.
It will give them away; their hooves
Make patterns which snow remembers.
In the cleared field, they linger
as the summoned prey whose part
is not to forgive. They can afford to die.
They have their place in the dying order.

(Glück, 2022, p. 109)

An equally introspective exploration of the creation of fictional garden space that exists in harmony with chaos can be found in Dickinson’s “Where I have lost, I softer tread” (J104):

Where I have lost, I softer tread—
I sow sweet flower from garden bed—

I pause above that vanished head
And mourn.

Whom I have lost, I pious guard
From accent harsh, or ruthless word—
Feeling as if their pillow heard,
Though stone!

When I have lost, you'll know by this—
A Bonnet black—A dusk surplice—
A little tremor in my voice
Like this!

Why, I have lost, the people know
Who dressed in flocks of purest snow
Went home a century ago
Next Bliss!

In these poems, both Dickinson and Glück bring in the elements of death, loss, and mourning in the garden. The elements that, from a human perspective, are only the agents of chaos and destruction, are absent in the idealized, so-called perfect spaces such as the Garden of Eden.⁸ The presence of these chaotic elements exists as these gardens have a heterotopic function. In comparison to reality, these poetic spaces exist to reflect on the world that is certainly familiar with the concepts of good and evil. This heterotopic quality provides the ground on which a utopian vision can be built. Reflection, meditation, and questioning of reality are the conditions that make transformation possible. Without them, reality would remain static. These poetic spaces, then, are essential for imagining utopia, particularly for groups that have long been denied such imaginative freedom.

One of the most significant ways in which Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück find union in their gardens is through the contemplation and revision of the Western utopian ideal: the Garden of Eden. The next chapter will focus on this topic in order to identify the social, cultural, and religious background of America, and to revise the Utopian ideals of the Edenic vision. The myth of Eden will be used as a bridge between Dickinson and Glück, as these two poets stand as examples of two American Eves, in control of their gardens.

⁸ Death is an element that is integral to the process of creation of the garden. To create a garden one must destroy the original order of nature. However, death is muted in the process, and exists as a passive act, only necessary for an end cause. The eventual aesthetic sense of the garden overpowers and mitigates the presence of death, although it always exists in the background.

Chapter II

American Eves in the Garden: The Utopian Elements in Glück and Dickinson's Revision of Eden

*I have lately come to the conclusion that I am Eve, alias
Mrs. Adam. You know there is no account of her death
in the Bible, and why am not I Eve?*

Emily Dickinson, Letter 9

*Then the angels saw
How He divided them:
The man, the woman, and the woman's body.
Above the churned reeds, the leaves let go
a slow moan of silver.*

Louise Glück, "Lamentations", *Descending Figure*

Gardens are considered to be humanity's first cradle in many cultures. Although the Biblical Garden of Eden is one of the most well-known spaces in historical and theological narratives, the myth of Eden is not exclusive to the Western tradition. Similarly, the cradle of humanity for diverse religions is often found in a garden, a space reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. For instance, ancient Sumerian texts tell the myth of Enki and Ninhursag, which takes place in the paradisiacal land of Dilmun.⁹ There, a garden is described as a space devoid of disease, ageing, or death. García-Jalón states that, unlike the mythical gardens of Enki and Ninhursag or the Hesperides¹⁰ In Greek tradition, the Garden of Eden wasn't meant for gods; it was

⁹ In the Kesh Temple Hymn (circa 2600 BCE), the temple of Keš is described as a luxuriant garden, where "the four corners of the universe become green like a garden for Enlil" (Hallo and van Dijk, 1968, p. 30). When Enki commands Utu, the sun god, to bring fresh water to Dilmun, the land is transformed into a fertile and habitable space (Jacobsen, 1976, pp. 113–119). Enki's subsequent act of planting and consuming sacred flora, each representing elements of human society and bodily function, establishes the garden as both a source of life and a site of transgression. His overreach causes a disruption that only Ninhursag's intervention can resolve, thereby reinforcing the garden as a locus of moral and divine balance (Black et al., 2006, pp. 43–47).

¹⁰ In Greek mythology, the Hesperides were nymphs who tended a lush, sacred garden at the Western edge of the world, where golden apples of immortality grew, that Gaea gave to Hera at her marriage to Zeus. The

created specifically for the first humans as their home, for them to exist in harmony with nature (García-Jalón, 2021, p. 6). Additionally, “contrary to Islamic mythology, the garden is not appointed as a reward for the righteous (Asín Palacios 1984, pp. 192–212), but rather as the place where the first man dwells” (García-Jalón, 2021, p. 6). Eden is the place into which the first human is placed “to dress it and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15), following responsibility rather than a possibility of reward. Eden is thus a site of moral order, which is characterised by perfect harmony with oneself and nature, where the garden does not unite dualities like life and death, but, on the contrary, there is no conflict between humanity and nature to begin with.

However, nowhere is the metaphysical intensity of the garden more deeply felt than in the Christian imagination. The Garden of Eden is the home from which humans are exiled, and a reimagined Eden is where they spiritually yearn to return. This longing is not only theological but deeply spatial, as it is in direct relation to the idea of home. Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* (1994) offers a phenomenological key to understanding this connection. For Bachelard, the house is not only an architectural structure but the first cosmos, a “corner of the world,” where the intimacy of being is first encountered. In his own words, “The house we were born in is more than an embodiment of home, it is also an embodiment of dreams... Our habits of a particular daydream were acquired there” (Bachelard, 1994, p. 15). Eden, in this framework, can be connected to the idea of the first home of humankind, although a necessary distinction must be made: house and a garden are two very different structures, with one being a closed space which creates its intimacy within its horizontal and vertical lines, and another a free space, which even when enclosed is open, always remains in direct connection with nature. However, Bachelard notes: “All really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home” (1994, p. 5). From this perspective, Eden can certainly acquire a (symbolic) functionality of a home.

Although Eden is not a space remembered through direct experience, it inhabits the Christian imagination as something profoundly intimate, something lost but emotionally alive. Its function is not that of a concrete historical location, but an oneiric dwelling which persists in

garden, guarded by the dragon Ladon, symbolized divine beauty and inaccessibility, and was most famously associated with Heracles' eleventh labor. Unlike the biblical Garden of Eden, this space was not created for humans but remained under divine protection (Hesperides, n.d.).

theological consciousness in the same way childhood homes persist in persist in Bachelard's psychoanalytic theory of space. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard writes, "Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images" (1994, p. 6). Eden, though no longer accessible, is retained in Christian consciousness in precisely this imaginal way, as a closed space, not physically but spiritually sealed off, and thus fertile ground for collective memory and desire. Its presence within the biblical imagination offers a kind of blueprint for what it means to dwell rightly, with the divine, with creation, and with the self. What's most striking is how Eden, like the house of memory in Bachelard's framework, is infused with compressed time. Bachelard writes: "In the theater of the past that is constituted by memory, the stage setting maintains the characters in their dominant roles... In its countless alveoli, space contains compressed time. That is what space is for" (1994, p. 8). The Garden of Eden works in precisely this way: it contains, within its brief biblical description, not just a lost paradise but an entire theology of harmony, sin, and human displacement. It becomes the space through which biblical time is folded and felt, mythical past, existential present, and a messianic longing for a return home held together in spatial form.

This allows us to compare Eden not directly with the house itself, but with the function of the house in Bachelard's poetics: as a structure that holds daydreaming, anchors imagination, and gives shelter to memory. "The house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace" (Bachelard, 1994, p. 6). Eden is not a house in architectural terms, but it is deeply homelike in the way it protects and shapes theological daydreaming. It is the psychic "home" to which the human condition compares all other forms of exile. Eden's inaccessibility is not a contradiction of its homelike function; it is the very reason it endures as a poetic structure of longing.

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard notes: "we are the diagram of the functions of inhabiting that particular house, and all the other houses are but variations on a fundamental theme" (Bachelard, 1994, p. 15). This diagram is not limited to domestic interiors. A garden, in this case, is an idealized, heterogeneous, even utopian space that lives in the collective Western memory and serves as a similar psychic container, bearing the layers of individual and even societal development. Indeed, in Christian poetics, gardens are often remembered as shelters of both innocence and transformation. Through Bachelard's insight that "All inhabited space

bears the essence of the notion of home" (1994, p. 5), it's possible to understand how even mythical experiences of the perfect, original home can leave lasting impressions on the formation of self, or in this case, on the formation of a whole culture. Because of the perfect, idyllic harmony that first humans experienced in the garden of Eden, as a space is one of the earliest expressions of the utopian ideal, humanity living in a perfect harmony in a space that can't necessarily be located, but is functional and exists in the memory. Theologically, this utopian idea has been a blueprint of what humanity must aspire to, and the perfection described to exist in Eden is what Western society has tried to replicate and reach. However, the settling of America took this idea to another level: heaven was no longer expected to be achieved in the afterlife, but it could have been replicated in the New Land. This biblical theme shaped American culture in various ways and influenced the societal structure of the whole nation. These influences may be the reason why Eden is so often mentioned in the poetry of Dickinson and Glück, where they use the biblical myth to explore the real idea behind what nations have imagined to be utopian throughout centuries. In their poetry, they revise the idea of utopia through the example of Eden, and depict the reality and problems that stand behind the space. In this way, they form a new idea of American Eve, who is again the one bringing the "chaos" in what is seemingly a replica of a perfect, utopian space.

From the Genesis account onward, the association between women and gardens has carried tremendous symbolic and material weight. Thus, the story of the Garden of Eden from the Book of Genesis of the Bible carries significance not only in presenting the garden as the original home of humankind, but also in shaping the gender roles in the Judeo-Christian world. The biblical story of Adam and Eve, described in the Book of Genesis, is the story of the first humans living in the Garden of Eden. It recounts how Adam and Eve defied God's command, resulting in their expulsion from paradise.

For centuries, Christianity was at the centre of Western civilisation; thus, the influence of the stories described in the Bible is evident in every generation of Western thought. In Genesis 2–3, the Garden of Eden is described as a place free from sin, death, and suffering. Central to this garden were the first humans, Adam and Eve, and two significant trees: the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Tree of Life reappears in Revelation 22, symbolising renewal and eternal life in the New Jerusalem for those who have faith in Jesus Christ. Conversely, the Tree of Knowledge serves a different narrative function. The Tree of

Knowledge of Good and Evil, the second-named tree in the Garden of Eden, was explicitly forbidden by God. When the serpent tempted Eve, both she and Adam defied God's command and ate the fruit¹¹. This act of disobedience introduced sin and death into the world, resulting in their expulsion from paradise. Since then, humanity has lived in a world marked by the consequences of that original sin.

The significance of this tree extends far beyond its physical presence. It symbolises the moment humanity chose to defy God, resulting in the loss of innocence and the subsequent need for redemption. The fall of Adam and Eve through the consumption of the forbidden fruit is fundamental to understanding human nature, the origin of sin, and God's redemptive plan as it unfolds throughout Scripture. Since that pivotal moment, humanity has seemingly been in perpetual search of a perfect garden, a place reminiscent of Eden, attempting to recreate this utopia in various ways. The existence of the Garden of Eden has been a subject of enduring debate. Some have spent decades conducting extensive research to locate this mythical place. Yet even if a geographical site were definitively proven to be the original cradle of humankind, it would never truly represent the Garden of Eden as described in Scripture. The Garden of Eden is an idea first and a place second. It was created for a version of humanity vastly different from what it is today. In Eden, the ideal human was crafted in the image of God, but a projection was shattered the moment Eve took the first bite of the forbidden fruit. The longing for Eden is not just a search for a physical space but a yearning for innocence, harmony, and a reconnection with the divine. It is a search for a paradise lost, an eternal symbol of humanity's desire to return to its purest form. Thus, even if it's ever possible to reach this space, its original semiotic value is already long lost and gone, and only exists in imagination. However, the story of exile placed a great deal of pressure on Eve, as she was seen as the original cause for humanity's exile from paradise. Her presence and actions in the

¹¹ In the Western tradition, the apple is widely considered to be the "forbidden fruit" eaten by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. However, the Bible does not specify the kind of fruit. It's possible that apples may have come from The Garden of the Hesperides, aka Hera's Orchard, in Greek Mythology, where Hera's Orchard also protected golden apples. Symbolic connections with two stories are strong with the Serpent and the idea of forbidden fruit in so-called "Paradise" type of setting. On the other hand, there are other possibilities as to why the apple is the fruit of choice for the story of the first humans in the Bible. In the Middle Ages, Western Christian art started to show the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden as an apple, especially in religious or symbolic scenes. This likely came from a linguistic twist: in Latin, the word "malum" can mean both "apple" and "evil." That overlap made the apple a fitting symbol of temptation. On top of that, apples were more familiar and widely grown in Europe, where most of these early Christian thinkers and artists lived, unlike the fruits native to the Middle East (Janik, 2011, p.31).

garden defined social standards, norms, and expectations for women in the Western world for centuries. Theologically, Eve has long been viewed both as the caretaker of paradise and as the agent of its disruption. This duality shaped not only Christian attitudes toward femininity but also socio-cultural practices, particularly in Western societies where religious narratives informed gender roles.

The significance of the garden became even greater in the context of the utopian desire for redemption from original sin and returning to paradise, which became a goal of Western civilisation, both in ecclesiastical and political forms, in the course of its development. Before it was founded, America was a utopian idea, with the Edenic model serving as its guiding principle. American mythology was rooted in biblical stories, and as the country expanded, its culture increasingly came to rely on Christian principles. Christianity predominated among the settlers, and its conservative nature played a crucial role in establishing social roles. Living under the shadow of humanity's original sin influenced the gendered norms in the country and led to the suppression of certain groups.

Additionally, being measured against the Edenic, utopian standard of a perfect world was another ideal to which Americans aspired. These constraints and expectations also echoed in American art and inevitably found their way into American poetry, including the work of Dickinson and Glück, who devoted many poems to exploring the boundary between utopia and lived reality, as well as the meaning and function of the Edenic ideal in everyday life.

The ideological vision of the United States as a sacred space, a terrestrial echo of the biblical Garden of Eden, is deeply rooted in the foundational narratives that shaped American identity and framed the rights and roles of women in American society. This lies at the heart of American Myths, starting with Manifest Destiny, the nineteenth-century doctrine that sanctioned expansion across the North American continent. It was never solely a geopolitical or economic rationale; it was a theological claim cloaked in the language of providence and divine election. John L. O'Sullivan, who coined the term "Manifest Destiny," described the United States' expansion as ordained by Providence "for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions" (cited in Rowe, 2003, p. 371). This invocation of divine sanction evokes the Christian mythos of Eden not as a static paradise to be preserved, but as a site to be restored, reclaimed, and cultivated through labor, struggle, and often violence. This

reinterpretation of Eden as a project of national renewal recasts the American landscape as a fallen, chaotic wilderness awaiting redemption through settlement, expansion, and cultivation. The theological support of this worldview is evident in the rhetoric of early colonial leaders like John Winthrop, who envisioned New England as a “city upon a hill,” a beacon of divine purpose for the world. This Puritan conception of America as a new chosen land, tested and sanctified, laid the groundwork for later narratives of exceptionalism and territorial entitlement (Rowe, 2003, pp. 96–98).

The Frontier Myth, central to this ethos, operates within a symbolic logic akin to the expulsion from Eden and the journey toward restoration. As Richard Slotkin argues in *Regeneration Through Violence*, the American frontier was cast as a regenerative crucible where identity, morality, and civilization could be forged anew but only through violent conquest and the subjugation of Indigenous peoples (Slotkin, 1973; Rowe, 2003, p. 375). The settler thus assumes a paradoxical role: both a redeemer and a destroyer, claiming Eden while simultaneously violating its innocence.

The racial and theological implications of American expansionism deepen this paradox. Scholars such as Reginald Horsman have traced how Manifest Destiny was underwritten by Anglo-Saxonist racial ideology, positing white Protestant Americans as the divinely elected stewards of civilization (Horsman, 1981; Rowe, 2003, p. 381). The Garden, in this framework, is not universally inherited but selectively awarded, with nonwhite populations cast as impediments to divine fulfilment. Christian rhetoric was often mobilized to justify removal and violence, even as it betrayed the very ethical principles of humility associated with Edenic theology. Moreover, the Myth-and-Symbol School of American Studies, pioneered by figures such as Henry Nash Smith and R. W. B. Lewis, highlighted how the “Virgin Land” and the “American Adam” became powerful national archetypes. The American Adam, conceived as a self-reliant figure unburdened by the corruptions of European history, echoed the biblical Adam before the Fall and reinforced the idea of America as a space for spiritual and civic rebirth (Rowe, 2003, pp. 2–4). Yet, this innocence was constructed through the erasure of the histories and presences of Indigenous peoples, women, and other marginalized groups.

In this sense, the American imagination did not merely reference Eden; it sought to perform and possess it. As Sacvan Bercovitch (1975) observed in *The Puritan Origins of the American*

Self, the religious narrative of mission and redemption became deeply embedded in the political and territorial structures of the United States. America did not merely interpret itself through Eden; it attempted to enact Eden on Earth, an effort that paradoxically relied on forms of exclusion, exploitation, and domination that subverted the very ideals of paradise it claimed to embody. The garden in the American mythic consciousness is not simply a metaphor for nature or cultivation; it is a theological construct, a projection of redemptive desire entangled with violence.¹²

This tension continues to shape American literary and political culture, particularly in the mythic structures we assign to landscapes and national identity. As John Carlos Rowe (2003) argues, the project of American exceptionalism relies on a continual “reoccupation” of the Edenic narrative. But in the 20th century, especially in response to imperial interventions and domestic unrest, this narrative began to collapse under its own weight. The garden, no longer a site of innocence or retreat, becomes a space haunted by failure, loss, and moral ambiguity. In this reimagining, the garden no longer symbolizes a restored paradise, but a reckoning with what Rowe calls the “disavowed consequences of American empire” (Rowe, 2003, p. 178). The myth of Eden, once a source of national coherence, now fractures under the weight of its exclusions of Indigenous genocide, of ecological devastation, and of the commodification of land and labor. Thus, the modern American garden is not merely a retreat but a palimpsest of cultural anxiety, inscribed with the contradictions of race, class, gender, and power. It is a site where the impossibility of a pure origin becomes most legible.

The irony of the American project lies in the fact that the more fervently settlers pursued the Garden, the further they seemed to fall from its ideal. In seeking to build a paradise on earth, the American project often reproduced its opposite. Perhaps this is why when encountering the garden imagery in the American poetry, such as the ones by Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück, the gardens are not always necessarily depicting the space of seclusion, where humans

¹² While the symbolic foundation of the American landscape as a reimagined Eden may have originated in Puritan typology and 19th-century expansionist rhetoric, its contradictions became increasingly visible with the rise of industrial modernity. As Leo Marx demonstrates in *The Machine in the Garden* (2000), the pastoral ideal that once symbolized a harmonious middle ground between civilization and nature was shattered by the literal and symbolic arrival of industrial power represented by the intrusion of the railroad into otherwise idyllic settings. Marx’s analysis of Hawthorne’s *Sleepy Hollow* passage underscores the cognitive dissonance inherent in the American self-image: the Edenic dream was never just about peaceful retreat; it also functioned as a mask for expansionist violence and technological domination (Marx, 2000, pp. 13–20).

spend their days in bliss, in harmony with the nature, and divine forces, but rather explore death, alienation, and the ways of transgressing the boundaries set for them by their society. Additionally, in their work, both poets are clearly highlighting the idea of a so-called perfect, harmonious, utopian vision that never actually came to be, and was defeated in the process of its establishment.

The idea of American Adam has long been explored in modern and contemporary scholarship and through various mediums. For example, Patricia Jewell McAlexander notes how the initial utopian impulse of the Puritan settlers maintained the view of women as active subjects, partners to their husbands who were regarded as self-sufficient (p253). Early into the inception of the American state, however, this view came to be dethroned and replaced by a strictly patriarchal position on the role and nature of women. The view of desexualized and restricted womanhood came to predominate, in which females were regarded as an intrinsically inferior sex, “daughters of Eve” who were to be shielded from temptation (p. 254). Women came to be relegated to domestic roles of motherhood inside their homes, organizing harmony for their families, and working with husbands. In this context, women don’t necessarily exist as individuals, but only in relation to men in their lives. The role and the idea of a woman in the New American Project were very much inspired by the story of Genesis and the creation of Eve in the Garden of Eden. As Genesis 3:21- 24 describes:

. . . But for Adam no suitable helper was found.

21 So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh.

22 Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

23 The man said, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.

24 That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Understanding these passages are vital in understanding the perception of women in the traditional, Christian societies: As Eve was perceived as a literal extension of Adam, created with a rib from his body, for *his* company, and his comfort, thus, it was long considered to be the main role and goal for women, to exist only in relation to American Adam. For centuries, women across the world had to fight for their rights to be seen outside this context. Their world, similarly to the one in the Garden of Eden, was never going to act in their favour. Eve, seduced by the serpent to take a bite from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, was punished by God, along with Adam, but their punishments were also quite different.

The division of punishment in the Genesis account marks one of the earliest and most enduring codifications of gendered suffering in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Though both Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden, the nature of their punishments reflects a symbolic bifurcation that has echoed through centuries of theological interpretation and cultural practice. Eve's sentence, in Genesis 3:16, is inscribed on the body: pain in childbirth, and subordination to her husband. These are not incidental burdens; they locate women's destiny in the domestic and the reproductive, turning her very biology into a space of divine discipline and submission. Adam's punishment, by contrast, turns outward. The ground is cursed because of him; he is condemned to wrest sustenance from a reluctant earth through labor and toil until he dies. What emerges from this asymmetry is a mythic framework in which women's suffering is interpersonal and embodied, while men's is existential and productive. The consequences are not limited to scripture. In the centuries that followed, Christian cultures, particularly in Europe and its colonial extensions, embedded this gendered theology into law, liturgy, and everyday social life. Women were often understood not as full moral agents, but as extensions of male authority: daughters, wives, or mothers whose primary value was relational. Even in early modernity, sermons and political treatises invoked Genesis to justify women's exclusion from education, governance, and theological discourse. The Edenic narrative thus became more than an origin story but a blueprint for hierarchy. It did not merely explain suffering; it structured it. And for women, that meant living within a legacy where their pain was not only inevitable but divinely ordained.

The sentence that was given to Eve by God echoed through the lives of most women born and raised in the Judeo-Christian context. However, as in the Garden of Eden, the first step into the possible change was again taken by women, who through their actions managed to

grant themselves with the rights that defied their roles of being an externalised version of a male individuality and gained rights that granted them with the possibility of life not necessarily attached and dependant to different male figures in their lives. Historically, these processes included various layers and complex socio-economic elements. By the 1830s, a handful of seminaries and “female academies,” for instance, Emma Willard’s Troy Female Seminary (founded 1821) and Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (founded 1837), which was attended by Emily Dickison between the years of 1847-1848, began training women not merely to become “accomplished” companions for men, but to think deeply about theology, history, and science. The tacit message these institutions carried was revolutionary: a woman could stand as a moral and intellectual peer to any man¹³.

With every one of these advances, women now argued that Eve’s punishment was not a cosmic decree but a distortion, to be reinterpreted in the light of both Scripture and social justice. Campaigns to highlight Galatians 3:28 “There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”, drawn directly from the Bible’s language of equality.

In every generation following that first “mother of all rebellions” in Eden, American Eve has confronted and unraveled the notion that their rightful place is beneath a husband’s authority. And so, where once a woman’s identity was bound to Genesis’s curse, she became, at last, a voter, a property owner, a paid worker, a steward of her mind and body, proving that religious tradition, like any human institution, can be reclaimed and reshaped to uphold human dignity.¹⁴

¹³ Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, feminist progress developed alongside religious revivals, legal reforms, and political movements. During the Second Great Awakening, women began to take on public moral authority through roles in revival meetings and temperance campaigns. Legal changes, such as the Married Women’s Property Acts, gradually recognised women as individuals with economic agency. These shifts laid the foundation for the suffrage movement, culminating in the 19th Amendment in 1920. In the decades that followed World War I, the Equal Pay Act (1963) and Title IX (1972) further expanded women’s participation in public life. The second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 70s, driven by voices like Betty Friedan and organisations like NOW, demanded not only legal equality but a radical redefinition of gender roles, labor, and autonomy.

¹⁴ By the 1980s, landmark decisions like “Roe v. Wade” (1973) and statutes such as the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (1978) enshrined elements of bodily sovereignty long denied to women. And yet, the battle did not end there. Debates over affordable childcare, gaps in pay between men and women, and the stubborn underrepresentation of women in political office revealed how deeply the old hierarchies had been established and how tenaciously women would continue to chip away at them. Despite the many gains of the feminist movement, American women continue to contend with fundamental rights that ought to have been settled long ago. Chief among these is reproductive autonomy: women still lack full authority over their own bodies and are often denied the power to decide what happens to them. As recent abortion law battles in various states reveal, women are once again judged and constrained according to a Judeo-Christian moral

The struggle for women's rights has long transcended individual experience, uniting women across generations who, in the absence of institutional support, found strength and legitimacy in one another. Their solidarity, forged in resistance to the dominant norms of each historical moment, has repeatedly taken shape in very concrete, material settings, such as schools, homes, hospitals, and political halls, where the terms of female agency were contested and, at times, rewritten. Yet alongside these tangible spaces exists a parallel, more elusive terrain: an imaginative realm where ideas, emotions, and identities could be explored with greater freedom. Alongside physical acts of protest and resistance, women have long turned to art as a powerful form of rebellion. Art is never truly apolitical; every aspect, from the right to create and share to being seen and heard, is deeply embedded in political contexts. Through various mediums, women artists have consistently used their work to reflect on their realities and push beyond the constraints imposed upon them.

Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück used their poetry for such a purpose: to reflect, understand, and transcend. For them, the gardens described in their poems are spaces where they find common ground. As they contemplate the idea of the divine Garden of Eden, they create a space where gardens serve as the site of personal redemption and contemplation.

In the gardens that the poets construct, they bring in the knowledge of good and evil, death, loss, mortality, and alienation. However, comparatively, they don't escape the image of Eden, but use it as an origin point. For Glück and Dickinson, the use of Eden often has a different use and goal; however, they are united in that sense, their poetic gardens are usually constructed in parallel to their reality, which exists as a parallel or a replica of the Garden of Eden. The heterotopic quality of the poetic gardens means that they allow us to question and analyze the impact and influence of the Edenic myth on American civilization.

There are a variety of poems across the works of Glück and Dickinson that question the credibility of the American Garden as a replica of Eden. This is the main motive in Louise Glück's "Matins", where she explores the idea of this replication. "Matins" opens with a direct call to God, like a failed prayer:

framework devised nearly two millennia ago. This reversion to ancient standards undermines the promise of equality and highlights that the struggle of the American "Eve" remains far from over.

MATINS

Unreachable father, when we were first
called from heaven, you made
a replica, a place in one sense
different from heaven, being
designed to teach a lesson; otherwise
the same—beauty on either side, beauty
without alternative— Except
we didn't know what was the lesson. Left alone,
we exhausted each other. Years
of darkness followed; we took turns
working the garden, the first tears
filling our eyes as earth
misted with petals, some
dark red, some flesh colored—
We never thought of you
whom we were learning to worship.
We merely knew it wasn't human nature to love
only what returns love.

(Glück, 2022, p. 247)

After a direct call to the “heavenly father”, the speaker starts exploring the well known Biblical narrative of the exile, but what is the most interesting is her calling out the new space created for humans after this fall, a so-called replica only created for humans to learn the lessons, once confronted with pain, and mortality, left alone to live without the privileges enjoyed in paradise. However, she mentions that the core of the lesson remains unknown, and while left alone, humans become exhausted in their attempt to find the right answers. Glück's phrasing (“replica... different... otherwise the same”) calls upon her reality and the space where she operates, which exists as the replication of the utopian ideas. However, she continues the poem by exploring the aftermath of the exile:

...
we exhausted each other. Years
of darkness followed, we took turns
working the *garden*, the first tears
filling out eyes as earth
misted with petals, some
dark red, some flesh colored -
we never thought of you
whom we were learning to worship.
we merely knew it want human nature to love
only what returns love.

(Glück, 2022, p. 247)

In this part of the poem, the most important line stands as: “we took turns/ working the *garden*”. This might sound like the memory of god’s punishment for Adam, who cast the following judgement on Adam in Genesis 3:17-19:

17 . . . Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;
18 Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;
19 In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. (Genesis 3:17-19)

Although this punishment was exclusively for Adam, Eve’s Earthly punishment according to Genesis 16 was directly connected to her body, the pain caused by childbirth, and no autonomy outside the relation to her husband: “in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee”. However, in the “Metins”, Glück defies this objective. She acknowledges that the pain experienced by “working the garden” has been equally destructive for each and every descendant of the Christian creationist narrative. In the poem, she states: “we never thought of you / whom we were learning to worship”. Through these lines, she poses the question of how well the nature of God is perceived and comprehended by people who have spent their whole lives “working the garden” for the deity and the mistake that caused them to live in the “replica” of Eden. The scholar, Daniel Morris, highlights that “Glück pointed to the influence of psychoanalysis on her work, as well as her early learning in ancient legends, parables, and mythology” (Morris, 2006, p.66). At the same time, being raised among Jewish religion, culture, and traditions, Glück spent her early life surrounded by religious ideas. However, this led to her protest against the influence. As stated by Glück, at some point, “rebelled against a religious education [that was] in my parents’ view, the expendable item” (Morris, 2006, p. 67) . Taking

the religious element of her biography, it's no surprise that Glück was exploring its implications on human life through her poems.

In "Matins", the poet is using the garden as a space not only to compare to Eden, but at the same time to acknowledge the futility behind the attempt of creating replicas of perfection, which eventually brings humans far away from the "Unreachable Father". Although for this exploration through the poem she uses the garden as a mirror to reflect on the narrative that has predisposed her life to "work the garden", she still tries to get the answers for what causes the failure to connect with the original space and what is her place in the inertial failure. This poem itself is a small replica of the garden that the poet is forced to inhabit within the reality that was written and decided for her centuries before her birth, yet she still questions what human nature is in such a space, getting to the answer as: "we merely knew it wants human nature to love/only what returns love". Additionally, the poem poses the question of the original garden of Eden and how it's considered to be the blueprint of the ideal life. If the exile from heaven had a tool on humanity, especially gender-specific differences, then to what extent can it be considered as ideal? In a world where one is deprived of the knowledge of good and evil, how can one be aware of doing something wrong? How fair is it to pose this reality as an original model of perfection? Glück states clearly that after having worked the garden, humans lost their original understanding of harmony and perfection as "we never thought of you/whom we were learning to worship". However, Eden still exists as one of the most significant models of utopias in Western society. Glück's other poem called "Matins" (*The Wild Iris*, 1992, p. 246) refers back to this nostalgia of Eden, and acknowledges it:

MATINS

The sun shines; by the mailbox, leaves
of the divided birch tree folded, pleated like fins.
Underneath, hollow stems of the white daffodils, Ice Wings, Cantatrice; dark
leaves of the wild violet. Noah says
depressives hate the spring, imbalance
between the inner and the outer world. I make
another case—being depressed, yes, but in a sense passionately
attached to the living tree, my body
actually curled in the split trunk, almost at peace, in the evening rain
almost able to feel
sap frothing and rising: Noah says this is
an error of depressives, identifying

with a tree, whereas the happy heart
wanders the garden like a falling leaf, a figure for
the part, not the whole.

(Glück, 2022, p. 246)

In this poem, the garden created by Glück is not necessarily just a mirror to uncover the true face of a sad replica, but to see herself placed in the world that she is clearly alienated from: “imbalance/ Between the inner and the outer world”. At the same time it's important to note that in Glück's poetics, her body itself becomes part of the garden. From this perspective, she reflects on Eden as an Earthly paradise, acknowledging that the version of the garden experienced by her is full of imperfections.

One important aspect here is that in this garden, the speaker is not alone. Noah is the son of Louise Glück, with whom she experienced the same sense of estrangement. According to Louise Glück's “Biographical” (2020), she felt the sense of frustration after becoming a mother: “When I thought about having a child, I was also aware that my poems had begun to seem to me repetitious”, at the same time, she stated, “I found myself a mother, inextricably involved with another person, at a time when I was, for various reasons, more open to bold experiment, to risk”. Becoming a parent was not an easy task for Glück, who found herself separated between two versions of herself, and made her doubt her abilities both as a poet and as a parent as a single mother.

However, when it comes to the heterotopic quality of Glück's gardens, no other poem carries it within than “The Garden” (*Descending Figure*, 1980, pp. 102–104). The poem is divided into five parts: 1. “The Fear of Birth” 2. “The Garden” 3. “The Fear of Love” 4. “Origins” 5. “The Fear of Burial”. In section 2, the garden acquires the living essence:

2. *The Garden*

The garden admires you.
For your sake it smears itself with green pigment,
the ecstatic reds of the roses,
so that you will come to it with your lovers.
And the willows—
see how it has shaped these green
tents of silence. Yet
there is still something you need,
your body so soft, so alive, among the stone animals.

Admit that it is terrible to be like them,
beyond harm.

(Glück, 2022, p. 102-103)

Personification in this poem is certainly not just a trope, but it is a reversal of subject and object. The poem starts with “The Fear of Birth” and then continues with “The Garden”. This garden is quite different from the previous ones as it aims to explore a different narrative. In the previous poems, Glück was aiming to address the issues faced even before birth, but for Dickinson, the garden is the essential part of understanding one's life, reality, and expectations for what to come, and what one can experience before and after being in the garden. For her, gardens always carry the role of transitional spaces that allow their visitors to enter the edge between the real and the fictional worlds. In this poem, the garden is as alive as a person experiencing being part of it. If a person can sense the garden, so can the garden do the same for them. “the willows— / see how it has shaped these green / tents of silence. Yet / there is still something you need, / your body so soft, so alive, among the stone animals.” (Glück, *Descending Figure*, 1980, p. 102). “Stone animals” turn the ornamental space into a mourning one. Here, Foucault’s classic example of heterotopia, the cemetery, enters the garden (p. 25). The body moves among effigies: the poem juxtaposes warm flesh and cold stone, life and artifact, in a single zone, while section 4 arrests ordinary time:

...

As though voices were saying
You should be asleep by now-
But there was no one. Nor
had the air darkened,
thought the moon was there,
already filled with marble.
As though, in a garden crowded with flowers,
a voice had said
How dull they are, these golds,
so sonorous, so repetitious
until you closed your eyes,
lying among them, all
stammering flame:

And yet you could not sleep,
poor body, the earth
still clinging to you—

(Glück, 2022, p. 103-104)

The moon arrives prematurely “filled... with marble,” a sculptural, death-cold object. This is heterotopic heterochrony: an interval where the expected transition (day to night) stalls and is replaced by an image of frozen time. In this garden, the dual nature of life is united: death and life coexist. This is why the cemetery serves as a particularly vivid example of heterotopia: for the individual, it begins with a profound temporal break, the end of life, and ushers in a kind of quasi-eternity, in which their enduring fate is decay and disappearance (p. 26). Section 5, “The Fear of Burial”, makes the image of the cemetery even more explicit:

...
In the empty field, in the morning,
the body waits to be claimed.
The spirit sits beside it, on a small rock—
nothing comes to give it form again.
Think of the body’s loneliness.
At night pacing the sheared field,
its shadow buckled tightly around.
Such a long journey.
And already the remote, trembling lights of the village
not pausing for it as they scan the rows.
How far away they seem,
the wooden doors, the bread and milk
laid like weights on the table.

(Glück, 2022, p. 103-104)

The poem collapses interior and exterior, home and grave, into one scene, the precise heterotopic “juxtaposing” of spaces “in themselves incompatible” (p. 6). The function of this garden is neither pure illusion nor pure compensation; instead, the poem alternates between exposure (showing the house already organized by death’s gravity) and discipline (training perception to inhabit that fact without metaphorical haze).

However, in this part of the poem, by dividing souls from the bodies, Glück might be communicating more than a spiritual message, but the one of being alienated from your own body. She experiences the same in the garden of “Matins” (247), when she experiences a deep connection with the body of a tree. Here, again, the separation between the mind and the body is vivid: “Think of the body’s loneliness”. Moreover, in this loneliness, the narrator is not alone. The space is filled with the elements one might expect in the garden, such as statues or animals, but at the same time, there is a lack of gendered figures in the garden,

only “spirits”. The poem explores the stages of life full of pain, alienation, unfamiliarity with the spaces that are supposedly familiar, and the circle of life that is older than the story of Eden in our consciousness.

The exploration of temporality and mortality of Glück continues in yet another garden space created in the *“Lover of Flowers”* (Ararat, 1990, p. 207):

In our family, everyone loves flowers.
That’s why the graves are so odd:
no flowers, just padlocks of grass,
and in the center, plaques of granite,
the inscriptions terse, the shallow letters
sometimes filling with dirt.
To clean them out, you use your handkerchief.

...
(Glück, 2022, p.207)

In this space, the heterotopia has been standardized and, paradoxically, emptied of heterogeneity. Foucault’s second principle, heterotopias can be made to “function in a very different fashion” over time, comes to life here (p. 25): the family’s garden absorbs the cemetery’s role, becoming a site of ongoing sorrow and memory.

This transfer alters the temporal experience of grief. The cemetery fixes remembrance in stone; the garden reanimates it in seasonal cycles of planting, tending, and loss (the poem recalls poppies dying “because they’re very fragile”). The garden, as a heterotopic space fused with another such site, the graveyard, brings together death, life, and temporality, elements that already exist in gardens, where life and death are part of daily practices. For humans, however, who cannot easily externalize the experience of death and mortality, the melancholy of a once-imagined immortality that echoes from the myth of Eden remains vivid.

In these poems, Glück creates a reality in which she positions herself as a spectator. At the same time, the gardens themselves hold memories, most often of loss, death, birth, and love, the most significant moments in life, recorded and fixed in their temporal frame. These spaces “freeze” time by examining its effects, and they can only be entered by following the author through her journey of exploring reality. Yet it is also essential to note that the bodies in these gardens are almost always gendered. The narrator is not always alone there; she shares the

space with various male figures, and most significantly with the Heavenly Father, the creator of all, whom she describes as “Unreachable.”

If the creator remains silent, and the garden is a fictional space for understanding the fragility of the real world, which itself is a flawed replica of the Garden of Eden, whose voice becomes the most essential guide for this journey? One perspective holds that it is the voice of the author, the one who constructs this fictional space for an individual, and perhaps a subconsciously collective act of exploration and study. Yet it is equally important to recognize that the main characters of these poems can also be the spectators, the readers, visitors, entering the garden with their interpretations, their own stories.

Another example of the Edenic revision happens in Glück’s “Spring Snow” from the collection of *The Wild Iris*. What distinguishes this garden from Eden is the introduction of moral and existential knowledge into its boundaries. Eden, in its mythic form, precedes the knowledge of good and evil; Glück’s garden in “Spring Snow”, however, is already shaped by that knowledge. The second half of the poem shifts from description to direct address:

...
I have heard your cries, and cries before yours,
and the demand behind them.
I have shown you what you want:
not belief, but capitulation
to authority, which depends on violence.

(Glück, 2022, p. 253)

The garden here functions as a revelatory space, exposing the mechanisms of power, its dependence on coercion, that underlie human longing for stability or divine order. This is not the Edenic “walk with God” in a realm of mutual harmony, but a confrontation with the compromised conditions of authority in a postlapsarian world.

By positioning the speaker as one who inhabits “two selves,” Glück constructs the garden as a space in which the lived experience of the world and the fictionalized, reflective reconstruction of it are held together. The actual world self bears the marks of mortality and historical reality; the garden self explores these truths from within a carefully bounded frame.

In this way, “Spring Snow’s” fictional garden is not an escape from the real but a heterotopic vantage point from which the real is more fully apprehended.

Yet another exploration of the Edenic Myth happens in “Retreating Wind” (*The Wild Iris*, 1992, p. 258). The opening lines “When I made you, I loved you. /Now I pity you” (Glück, 2022, p. 253) establish an unbridgeable alienation between creator and created. The voice here is not human but divine or cosmic, speaking from outside the human perspective. This positions the fictional garden within a postlapsarian context: the speaker’s pity acknowledges the irrevocable loss of the perfection that once defined the creator–creature relationship: “I gave you all you needed: /bed of earth, blanket of blue air” (Glück, 2022, p. 253). In the present, the gift has failed to yield the intended result: “Your souls should have been immense by now, / not what they are,/ small talking things” (Glück, 2022, p. 253). The garden mirrors the mythic paradise in its material composition (“bed of earth,” “blue air”), yet it contests it by refusing to replicate its moral and spiritual reciprocity. In Eden, humanity’s place in the garden was sustained within the conditions posed by the creator to Adam and Eve; here, the divine gaze registers disappointment and distance, not communion. However, the perspective in this poem differs from that of other poems in a similar context. Usually, the poems that are set in the garden-like space are observed from the perspective of a female speaker, who is acknowledging the flaws of her reality and uses the space to contemplate the issues. On the other hand, in this poem, the speaker is the creator, the one responsible for human life, Eden, and Earth, and who can never be detached from humans. The knowledge that enters this fictional garden is the recognition of the results of the exile and the misuse of time by people: “time you didn’t know how to use— / you wanted more, the one gift / reserved for another creation” (Glück, 2022, p. 253).

As a space of compensation, however, the garden offers a perfected temporal structure in contrast to the “bird’s flight” of human life, linear, brief, beginning and ending in stillness. The arc described “from the white birch / to the apple tree” is both precise and self-contained, reflecting an order that is coherent and complete without human intervention. The “two selves” are implicit in this construction: the human self bound to linear time and historical reality, and the reflective self that moves within the fictional garden to observe and interpret the order of the nonhuman world. The first self cannot re-enter the garden’s temporality, but the second operating within the heterotopic framework can apprehend its difference and

learn from its structure. However, what are the images of the self? Who is in the garden? Is it the poet, taking up the role of Eve, whose story has shaped the lives of women across the history of the Western World and beyond, or is it the creator? Could it be the poet associating herself with the creator, as humans are supposed to be bound to the divine?

Nevertheless, the garden is the space of choice for this contemplation that can always be open to interpretation. The space here is especially symbolic as the garden unites the dualities of life, as it's the space that depicts both birth and death, leisure and work at the same time. It is a perfect representation of the circular nature of life, and shows how each part of it is connected and responsible for the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. The possibilities of the spectator's identity are equally linear in the poem, as it can be either or simply all at once.

Following the discussion of Glück, where the garden emerges as a functioning heterotopia that reshapes the experience of time, the distribution of voice, and the terms of access, Dickinson's gardens reveal a parallel spatial logic, but under a different set of pressures. However, in her poems, one can also discover the heterotopic function. The way Dickinson uses the idea of Eden is different from Glück's. However, in her garden poems, she similarly brings in the elements of death and divine chaos. In her poem "We should not mind so small a flower" (J81), Dickinson calls for the lost garden: "Our little garden that we lost / Back to the Lawn again—". However, her vision in the poem differs significantly from Glück's. It's much more vibrant, and does not always carry the tragic element. The same poem continues with a depiction of the natural world:

We should not mind so small a flower –
Except it quiet bring
Our little garden that we lost
Back to the Lawn again.
So spicy her Carnations nod –
So drunken, reel her Bees –
So silver steal a hundred flutes
From out a hundred trees –
That whoso sees this little flower
By faith may clear behold
The Bobolinks around the throne
And Dandelions gold.

Eden is mentioned in a different context by the poet. For instance, in the poem “I’m the little ‘Heart’s Ease’!” (J176), she calls Eden old-fashioned, and through this statement tries to highlight its significance. Old-fashioned in this sense is not necessarily used in a negative manner, but mostly is used to identify the nature of its immortality, and in some ways, timelessness, as its the myth that carried as much influence in Dickinson’s reality, as centuries before: “Dear, Old fashioned, little flower! / Eden is old fashioned, too! / Birds are antiquated fellows! / Heaven does not change her blue”.

However, within such spaces, that seem somewhat harmonious, she also brings in the elements of mourn and loss, just like in the poem “Where I have lost, I softer tread—” (J104):

Where I have lost, I softer tread—
I sow sweet flower from garden bed—
I pause above that vanished head—
And mourn.
Whom I have lost, I pious guess—
At length, will count it gain
Because it was not Angel fell—
To that ethereal Pain—
When I have lost, you’ll know by this—
A Bonnet black—A dusk surplice—
A little tremor in my voice
Scarce to be noted—

In this poem, Dickinson intertwines gardening and grief, treating them as part of the same continuous act. The speaker plants, then pauses over a “vanished head.” The garden becomes inseparable from a burial ground, turning the space into a kind of cemetery. In doing so, it creates a place where different kinds of time coexist: the repeating cycles of growth and cultivation, and the singular moment of death. One doesn’t cancel out the other; rather, they share the same ground. The poem resists keeping these experiences in separate spheres, instead folding mourning into the daily rhythm of tending plants.

Within her poetry, Dickinson constructs different ideas of gardens than Glück. She uses Eden often as a metaphor and connects it directly to her reality. Dickinson, like Glück, constructs her garden spaces often to reflect on the Edenic utopian ideal. She does not always simply

echo Paradise, or resist it, but questions whether eternal reward could ever compensate for earthly estrangement. Dickinson, like Glück, grew up in a religious environment. According to the Emily Dickinson Museum: “brought up in a Calvinist household, the young Emily Dickinson attended religious services with her family at the village meetinghouse, Amherst’s First Congregational Church (“Emily Dickinson and the Church”, par. 2). Although Dickinson struggled deeply with her relationship to God, she chose not to join the church, not as an act of rebellion, but as a way of staying faithful to her own sense of self: “I feel that the world holds a predominant place in my affections. I do not feel that I could give up all for Christ, were I called to die” (“Emily Dickinson and the Church”, par. 5). Religion was a big part of Dickinson’s reality, surrounded by Christian narratives, Biblical stories, and societal pressures of being a woman in the 19th century Massachusetts found their way to Dickinson’s poetry.



Figure 4. Emily Dickinson’s Bible, a gift from her father Edward in 1844

As described by Joana Yin, in *An Emily Dickinson Encyclopedia*, Dickinson often imagined gardens as “Paradise” or “Eden,” reworking the biblical stories of Creation, the Fall, and the promise of a new heaven in *Revelation*. In her poems, she reflects on the nature of God, on the roles of men and women in the original Eden, and on the kind of paradise that might be regained in heaven. But she also found glimpses of paradise here on earth. For example, she once told her brother Austin that Amherst felt “like a bit of Eden,” and in another poem she even claimed that “Earth is Heaven” (p.123).

The revision of Edenic myth is a significant motive in Dickinson's work, especially among the poems identified for this study. Two poems in particular, "What is – 'Paradise' – (J215) and "I never felt at home - Below –" (J413), display Dickinson's characteristic unease with utopian myths. Both situate "Paradise" as a foreign, uncomfortable space that fails to offer the intimacy and familiarity of New England life. Through these revisions, Dickinson dismantles the notion of Eden as an ideal model, reconfiguring it as another realm of alienation, starting with "What is – 'Paradise' –":

What is – "Paradise" –
Who live there –
Are they "Farmers" –
Do they "hoe" –
Do they know that this is "Amherst" –
And that I – am coming – too –

Do they wear "new shoes" – in "Eden" –
Is it always pleasant – there –
Won't they scold us – when we're homesick –
Or tell God – how cross we are –

You are sure there's such a person
As "a Father" – in the sky –
So if I get lost – there – ever –
Or do what the Nurse calls "die" –

I shan't walk the "Jasper" – barefoot –
Ransomed folks – won't laugh at me –
Maybe – "Eden" a'n't so lonesome
As New England used to be!

In this poem, the speaker begins with a question so direct it sounds almost childlike: "What is – 'Paradise' – / Who live there –." Already Paradise is distanced by quotation marks, a signal that the word itself is not quite trustworthy. Dickinson's speaker wonders not about angels or eternal bliss, but whether the inhabitants are "Farmers," and if they "hoe." The image undercuts centuries of theology with a single gesture, turning Eden into a New England farm. The humor here is sharp: instead of a celestial city, she sees a space of ordinary toil, uncomfortably close to her own surroundings.

But the poem doesn't stop at satire. There's a flicker of genuine anxiety in lines like "So if I get lost – there – ever – / Or do what the Nurse calls 'die' –." That plainness destabilizes Paradise

as a transcendent hope; some sort of utopian ideal, and the speaker cannot picture it as anything more than an extension of what she already knows. How can paradise free from the knowledge of good and evil, death and decay, loss and mourning accept the individuals who exist with this constant on Earth, in societies which exist as only replicas of Eden? And yet, the final twist complicates the tone: “Maybe – ‘Eden’ a’n’t so lonesome / As New England used to be!”. Eden may not be perfection, but it might at least feel less lonely than home. In this deflating comparison, Paradise is stripped of greatness. Its worth is measured against the speaker’s provincial reality, and it comes out only marginally better. Additionally, the poem “I never felt at Home — Below —” goes further, moving from questioning to refusal:

I never felt at Home – Below –
And in the Handsome Skies
I shall not feel at Home – I know –
I don’t like Paradise –

Because it’s Sunday – all the time –
And Recess – never comes –
And Eden’ll be so lonesome
Bright Wednesday Afternoons –

If God could make a visit –
Or ever took a Nap –
So not to see us – but they say
Himself – a Telescope

Perennial beholds us –
Myself would run away
From Him – and Holy Ghost – and All –
But there’s the “Judgment Day”!

When Dickinson writes: “I shall not feel at Home – I know – / I don’t like Paradise –” the bluntness is startling. For a nineteenth-century poet raised in a Calvinist environment, such a rejection of Heaven’s promise is audacious. Her reasoning is characteristically unsentimental: Paradise is imagined as an endless Sabbath, a place where it is “Sunday – all the time.” For Dickinson, whose culture treated the Sabbath as a day of rigid constraint, this is not bliss but boredom stretched to eternity. Her portrait of God in this poem is equally unsettling. He is imagined not as a loving presence but as an all-seeing “Telescope.” Rather than intimacy, the speaker anticipates constant exposure, an endless surveillance that leaves no room for privacy or rest. And so she admits, almost with a shrug, that she would run away: “Perennial

beholds us – / Myself would run away.” Paradise is not a homecoming but another site of alienation, one she instinctively resists.

What emerges from these two poems is not a vision of Paradise as fulfillment but as estrangement. Where the Biblical Eden offers innocence and the Christian Heaven offers eternal reward, Dickinson offers unease, and refusal. She does not reject the myth outright so much as expose its failure to comfort her. By measuring Eden against Amherst, she makes New England, not Heaven, the true ground of comparison. If Glück critiques the replica of Eden as a space of labor and punishment, Dickinson critiques the original as joyless and even unlivable. Both poets, however, use the figure of the garden to test the utopian promise that Western culture has long attached to Eden. Dickinson’s skepticism is especially sharp: her Paradise is never fully otherworldly but always inflected by her own reality, haunted by the same loneliness, labor, and estrangement she already knows.

Yet in another of her poems, “Why – do they shut Me out of Heaven?” (J248), Dickinson asks questions that were hard to voice out loud in her conservative environment:

Why – do they shut Me out of Heaven?
Did I sing – too loud?
But – I can say a little "Minor"
Timid as a Bird!

Wouldn't the Angels try me –
Just – once – more –
Just – see – if I troubled them –
But don't – shut the door!

Oh, if I – were the Gentleman
In the "White Robe" –
And they – were the little Hand – that knocked –
Could – I – forbid?

This poem is a perfect example to explore why these fictional gardens were necessary for poets to create. Dickinson is brought to ask a question of why she was shut out of Heaven, the space which is supposed to be an ideal, utopian space for humanity. However, she acknowledges the reason: she sang too loud. Again in this space, Dickinson’s idea of Edenic ideal is far from a perfect environment, but a space where she still experiences alienation. As explored by Christine Gerhardt, Dickinson uses gardens as transitional spaces: “Yet even as

her poems unsettle views of the garden as a space that enables the recreation of a lost Eden, they do not invalidate the necessity of this critical utopia. In Dickinson's poetry, the garden ideal turns out to be impossible to realize and inherently problematic, but it remains essential, both metaphysically and ecologically" (p.534). As mandated by the religious doctrine, only the women who follow the path laid out to them, and exist in the shadow of the gender specific social roles ascribed to them, would be lucky enough to enter heaven.

While Dickinson was far from such an image, she scattered the idea of heavenly, Edenic myth in her work, signifying that acceptance in such spaces is conditional. If one has to meet special criteria to be accepted in the space created specifically for an ideal life, can the space ever truly be perfect? Just like Eve in the Garden of Eden, Dickinson poses questions about her reality. As an American Eve, she does not accept what is given to her, but brings in the elements of chaos and introspection.

Through their spatial poetics, Dickinson and Glück revised the idea of Western utopian ideals, while reimagining the connections between nature and culture. Moreover, while revising well-established religious and utopian ideals, both poets managed to incorporate the utopian impulse into their poetry, as identified in the dissertation through the use of digital humanities tools.

Chapter III

Dickinson and Glück's Utopian Gardens: A Digital Experiment

In the myth of the Garden, the forbidden exerts over the susceptible human mind irresistible allure. It shapes, ever afterward, human character and the human vision of human destiny.

It is a great theme –it can turn a good poet into a great poet.

Louise Glück, "The Forbidden", *Proofs and Theories*

The utopian impulse comes into Dickinson's and Glück's gardens in two ways: first, with the element of hope; second, with agency. There are many paths that could have shown the possibility of this impulse in their poetic gardens. However, this dissertation took an experimental approach with Digital Humanities tools, crossing close reading with distant reading methods.

Distant reading, a term coined by Franco Moretti in his 2000 article, "Conjectures on World Literature", was the method that allowed for catching patterns that can be useful for poetic analysis. Although it is possible to notice specific patterns among Dickinson and Glück's body of work with a traditional, close reading method, quantifying these tendencies across an entire corpus revealed broader patterns that could have been missed. The computational approach also lent statistical weight to interpretive claims: when we say that Dickinson gravitates toward verbs of knowledge and perception, this is not impressionistic but grounded in data. At the same time, the results did not replace close reading. Instead, they directed attention to the verbs most in need of interpretation and critical analysis.

The significance of distant reading lies in several factors: it allows for working with a large body of data, while allowing specific patterns to get uncovered, especially when working with a large corpus or when doing a comparative study. Moretti argues that distance itself creates

the possibility of knowledge, because it shifts attention to units of analysis either smaller or larger than the single text, such as devices, themes, tropes, or entire genres and systems. When the text as an individual object falls away in this process, he suggests that loss can be productive; in this case, less really does amount to more (Moretti, 2000, p. 57). However, the approach comes with its limitations. There are aspects that computational data can't capture. Such examples include irony, rhythm, or tone. Thus, there is always a possibility of missing the data that can be important for the research. However, Moretti states that, in the process of distant reading,

the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, Less is more. If we want to understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing something. We always pay a price for theoretical knowledge: reality is infinitely rich; concepts are abstract, are poor. But it's precisely this 'poverty' that makes it possible to handle them, and therefore to know. This is why less is actually more. (Moretti, 2000, pp.57-58)

Although Moretti's suggestion on that matter has a valuable insight, and in most cases, less is truly more, it is important to remember that visualizations and data are interpretive rather than neutral. As Johanna Drucker insists, "we need a humanities approach to the graphical expression of interpretation" (Drucker, 2011, p. 1). That begins by recognizing the status of evidence: "Data are capta, taken not given, constructed as an interpretation of the phenomenal world, not inherent in it" (Drucker, 2011, p. 3). In practical terms, computational procedures—counting first-person verbs, filtering for garden lexemes, plotting frequencies—are useful because they surface patterns that are otherwise hard to verify across many poems; but their outputs (tables, graphs) are arguments, not neutral mirrors. Treating them as capta keeps the workflow honest: we use computation to make patterns legible and then return to close reading for identifying other important elements, such as tone, irony, rhythm, and context (Drucker, 2011, pp. 1–2).

As stated by Matthew Jockers in his 2013 *Macroanalysis: Digital Methods and Literary History*, most digital tools have been designed with close reading in mind. When traditional training in close reading is simply paired with these narrow text-analysis tools, the outcome is usually a faster or more efficient search process, but not necessarily deeper insight. However, it must be argued that a distant reading can be a helpful method, especially in many cases, such as this dissertation, when paired with a close reading method. For this dissertation, digital

humanities tools helped identify and filter poems set in gardens. It was a process that proved to be time-efficient and sharp. At the same time, it helped in the process of selection by separating exactly which poems were speaking of gardens, orchards, paradise, or Heaven. When working with such a large corpus as the complete poetry of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück, it's important to maintain accuracy and try to cover all the possible data. At the same time, the ultimate goal of the dissertation was to depict whether there is a utopian impulse in the gardens of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück, and for this ultimate goal, the frequency analysis of action verbs was a helpful visual representation of possible agency in the poems, an element that was used to identify the utopian impulse. However, with Drucker's idea of Data being kept in mind, the dissertation resorted to a critical analysis of data, which led to the answer to the main research question.

By using R programming language, the complete body of works of Dickinson and Glück was filtered to identify poems with a garden setting to later filter the selection and display a graph of most frequently used I + Action verbs in the poems. The aim was to strengthen the argument that the gardens of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück are, at their core, utopian spaces. The reason for the frequency analysis was to catch a pattern, and see if the poets establish agency in these poems, and if so, how.

As with the earlier stage of garden filtering, the starting point was two CSV files. The two principal data sources for this study were two CSV files (containing complete poems) residing on the Desktop, one for Emily Dickinson ("Dickinson.csv") and one for Louise Glück ("Glück.csv"). For each data source, the first column contained a poem title, and the second a poem text. When the title was not available or when it was just a number, a heuristic was defined to derive a readable label from the poems. The generated title was the first eight words of the text.

For the first part of the analysis, the poems that mention gardens or related terms were extracted by using the R package "stringr". The use of stringr provided support for regular expressions and text manipulation. A case-insensitive regex pattern was used for garden-related words, which were located anywhere in the text. At the core of the methodology was a comprehensive garden-related vocabulary lexicon.

It was important to create a vocabulary for the terms that are expected to be found in gardens, so referring to botanical taxonomy, landscape history, and garden theories, such as one of Bacon, the study united 125 terms that are divided in fifteen categories:

1. Core garden words: “garden,” “Garden of Eden,” “eden,” “orchard”, “Paradise”, “Heaven”.
2. Flowers: roses (Tea Rose, Climbing Rose), lilacs, tulips, daffodils, lilies, violets, daisies, pansies, irises, peonies, hyacinths, marigolds, zinnias, morning glories, bleeding hearts, magnolias, gardenias, snapdragons, lilies-of-the-valley, orchids, hibiscus, bougainvillea, bird-of-paradise, alliums, crocuses, snowdrops, gladiolus, ranunculus, anemones, poppies, celosia, coreopsis, echinacea, salvia, scabiosa, sweet peas, statice, larkspur, delphinium, rudbeckia, hellebores, lupines, nicotiana, verbena, clematis, blackberry.
3. Ferns and foliage: Boston fern, maidenhair fern, ostrich fern, Japanese painted fern, hosta, heuchera, coleus, caladium, and colocasia.
4. Succulents and cacti: echeveria, sedum, sempervivum, aloe vera, agave, kalanchoe, jade plant, haworthia, barrel cactus, prickly pear.
5. Shrubs and bushes: hydrangea, rhododendron, boxwood, holly, lavender, spirea, euonymus, viburnum, butterfly bush, mock orange, wintergreen, honeysuckle.
6. Trees and large plantings: oak, chestnut, maple, birch, Japanese maple, magnolia, dogwood, cherry blossom, apple, pear, plum, peach, quince, olive, citrus, ginkgo, willow, cedar, pine, fir.
7. Groundcovers & grasses: Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue, Bermuda grass, mondo grass, creeping thyme, ajuga, vinca minor, pachysandra, clover, sedge, moss, creeping Jenny, dichondra.
8. Ornamental grasses: pampas grass, fountain grass, switchgrass, miscanthus, blue oat grass, bamboo.
9. Herbs & edibles: mint, basil, rosemary, thyme, oregano, sage, cilantro, parsley, dill, chives, tarragon, tomatoes, lettuce, carrots, peppers, cucumbers, zucchini, eggplant, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, grapes, rhubarb.

10. Fungi: mushrooms, shiitake, oyster, morel, chanterelle.
11. Structures & hardscape: benches, tables & chairs, swings, arbors, pergolas, trellises, gazebos, fences, walls, planters & pots, raised beds, bridges, decking, lattice panels, greenhouses, cold frames.
12. Ground treatments and pathways: mulch, gravel, pebbles, sand, decomposed granite, paving stones, flagstones, brick, cobblestone, crushed shell, stepping stones, bark chips.
13. Sculptural and water features: statues, fountains, ponds & streams, sundials, birdbaths, wind chimes, garden stakes, obelisks, urns, topiary, gazing balls, mirrors, and grave stones.
14. Wildlife and visitors: birds (robin, sparrow, cardinal, hummingbird, thrush, warbler, goldfinch, blue jay, bobolink, dove, oriole, wren, woodpecker, owl), insects (bee, butterfly, moth, ladybug, dragonfly, grasshopper, cricket, ant, beetle, spider, snail, slug), small mammals (rabbit, squirrel, chipmunk, mouse, vole, shrew, hedgehog, bat, cat, dog, raccoon, fox, deer), amphibians & reptiles (frog, toad, newt, salamander, lizard, snake, turtle), god, son, father, mother, sister, brother.
15. Elements and ambience: flowers, grass, fruit, woods, waters, clouds, vegetables, nature.

Each term was individually escaped for regex safety, then concatenated into one large pattern with word-boundary anchors and a case-insensitive flag:

```
garden_pattern <- "(?i)\\b(" + paste(garden_terms, collapse="|") + ")\\b"
```

This pattern matched any occurrence of any garden term as a standalone word or phrase.

After collecting and labelling garden-related terms and the presence of natural and human-made objects in the garden, the next step aimed at Computational Filtering for Garden Imagery.

With the lexicon defined, the entire corpus was scanned. For each poem, `stringr::str_extract_all` retrieved every case of a garden term; `unique()` collapsed duplicates; `length()` counted distinct references. Poems with at least one match comprised the “garden-related” subset.

This subset was exported as `garden_related_poems.csv`, ensuring that no poem with relevant imagery was overlooked. The results generated all the poems with the mention of gardens and orchards, paradise, heaven, Eden, and garden-related themes. Later, the close reading method was applied to choose the final poems for the research. It's essential to address that the data was only considered complete once the poems mentioning "Heaven" and "Paradise" were also included in the selection. Although they might not directly mention the word "Garden", they still serve the purpose of reimagining Edenic utopian ideals, and are crucial for critical analysis of the matter.

Following a comprehensive analysis of the works of Dickinson and Glück, a selection of poems was identified for comparative study of garden spaces depicted by each poet. Poems were chosen based on thematic similarities and their relevance to the research questions. Key selection criteria included the representation of different bodies, exploration of death and temporality, and commentary on the concept of the primal home.

The last few terms were important to include in the analysis, as many of the gardens constructed by Dickinson and Glück exist as a direct reflection of Eden in an attempt to revert this space, and examine it. This addition allowed the inclusion of poems crucial for the analysis.

To move from close reading to a broader comparative picture, the study employed digital text analysis to examine how Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück utilize first-person action verbs in their garden poems. The R script brought together a series of steps that filtered, annotated, and visualized the data. The texts were processed with **udpipe**, a natural language processing tool that tags parts of speech and reduces words to their lemmas. This made it possible to isolate every instance in which the pronoun *I* was directly followed by a verb. Importantly, auxiliary verbs such as *be* or *have* were excluded, since they do not independently convey action. What remained were the verbs that most clearly could articulate agency.

Once the poems were filtered to include only those with references to gardens, the text was processed with a part-of-speech tagger so that every instance of *I* followed by a verb could be identified. After reducing the verbs to their lemmas, the results were grouped by author and

displayed in the form of bar graphs, displayed as Figure 5. where it is possible to see the most frequently used action verbs among the garden poems of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück.

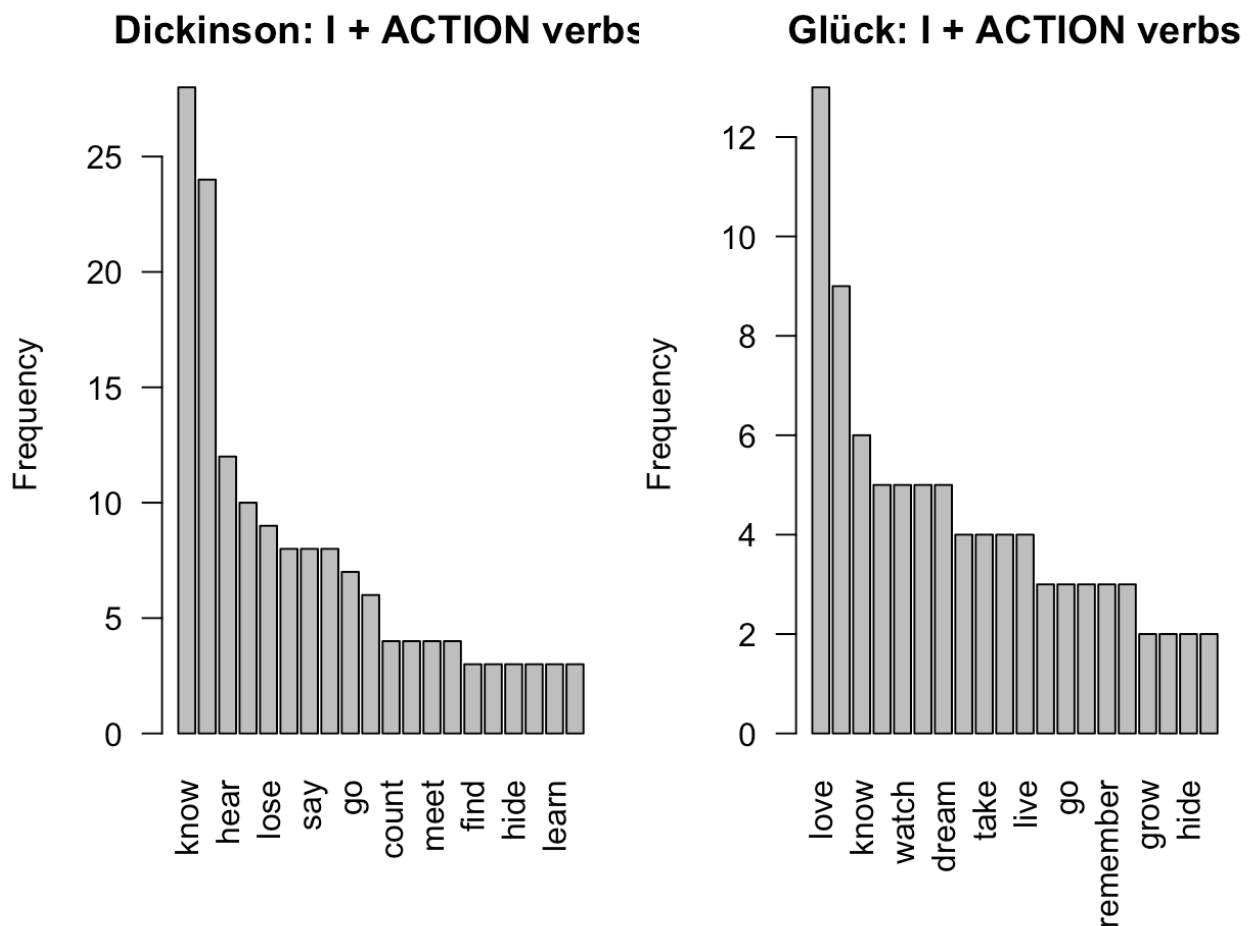


Figure 5. Bar graph of frequency analysis depicting the most frequent I+Action verbs in the garden poems of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück

Bar graphs present the most frequently used verbs in a simple and immediately legible format. Instead of working through dense tables of raw counts, the reader can see at a glance which verbs dominate Dickinson's and which recur most often in Glück's garden poems. The advantage of this approach lies in its clarity. A bar graph makes patterns visible that might otherwise appear irrelevant or be missed during close reading.

This use of digital tools illustrates the strength of digital humanities for literary research. Digital humanities methods allowed the study to move confidently from linguistic patterns to interpretive claims about agency and the utopian impulse in Dickinson and Glück, showing how small, repeated linguistic acts become the building blocks of poetic subjectivity. Moretti insists that “texts are real objects—but not objects of knowledge. If we want to explain the laws of literary history, we must move to a formal plain that lies beyond them” (Moretti, 2005, pp. 76–77). This argument underscores why computational approaches matter: they allow literary researchers to move from individual interpretation to the recognition of systemic patterns. For projects like this dissertation, which aim to understand how agency is expressed in Dickinson’s and Glück’s garden poems, digital analysis is not a substitute for close reading but a necessary complement, one that helps reveal broader tendencies while leaving room for interpretation.

Based on the results displayed on the bar graphs, it is visible that together, Dickinson and Glück outline related versions of action. Based on the frequency analysis, it’s visible that Dickinson presses outward through knowing, hearing, speaking, and counting. Glück holds inward through loving, remembering, and dreaming. Both approaches accord with a view of utopia as dynamic rather than static, born from present conditions yet not confined by them. In Dickinson, the dynamic appears as forward motion toward a horizon that cannot yet be reached. In Glück, it appears as quiet endurance that refuses to dissolve under pressure. The figure of the American Eve places these contrasts in a cultural and historical frame.

In American tradition, Eve embodies both transgression and renewal. The biblical story of expulsion from Eden, retold through a Protestant and Puritan lens, casts women as suspects whenever they sought knowledge or desire. Yet the same story also set the stage for reinterpretation. Dickinson’s language responds directly to this legacy. To write “I know” in her context was to resist a culture that warned women against intellectual ambition. Knowledge in this context is the element of legacy. This space itself is created by the poet for herself to learn, know, and question the layers of life that couldn’t be explored in reality. Thus, her Eve is the maker of a new garden, one marked not by innocence lost but by the deliberate work of knowing, perceiving, and measuring life as it is lived.

Glück's verbs take up the myth at another angle. Writing in the later twentieth century, with different forms of authority available to women and with different forms of pressure as well, she gives Eve a vocabulary of endurance. "Love," "remember," "dream," and "live" name the practices that keep a self intact after exile. If the earlier narrative punished desire for knowledge, the one found through the poetry of Dickinson and Glück often fractures the subject through alienation, competing roles, and the instability of attachment. Glück answers this by asserting continuity. To love in inhospitable conditions is to reject the logic of fragmentation. To remember is to keep faith with an inner history that institutions cannot fully script. To dream is to hold open a future in the present tense. Her Eve does not ask to return to paradise. She insists that life after paradise is still life, and her verbs are the means by which it continues; thus, the final goal is for Eve to exist outside the garden, and the garden to exist without Eve.

Read together, the two revisions amount to a cultural intervention. The American Eve is not defined by expulsion in these gardens, and she is not consigned to silence. She knows, hears, and speaks; she loves, remembers, and dreams. The scene is not a restored Eden, and it is not a simple rejection of the myth, it is a transformation of it. The garden in this context is the place where a woman claims the right to knowledge and the right to endurance, and where those claims generate a shared space for readers who enter and recognize themselves. What the corpus data confirm, the poems make felt. The verbs are small, but they carry the ongoing work of self-awareness, hope, and desire of knowledge of transformation, found through verbal forms such as *I remember*, *I know* and *I dream*. They show the ongoing work of utopia in practice, by acknowledging the reality, and sustaining hope.

The analysis of first-person verbs in the garden poems of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück highlights two different ways of negotiating agency under conditions where women's identities were restricted by cultural and historical circumstances. What appears in the data is not only a set of stylistic choices but a deeper indication of how each poet worked within, and against, the limits of her time. Dickinson repeatedly turns to verbs of cognition and perception, *know*, *hear*, *say*, but also to verbs that register absence and measurement, such as *lose*, *count*, and *go*. Glück, in contrast, relies more heavily on verbs that signal emotional or existential stance: *love*, *dream*, *live*, *remember*, while still returning to verbs of perception like *watch* and *know*. The two patterns are not oppositional. They suggest complementary

strategies: Dickinson enacts agency through knowledge, perception, and reckoning, while Glück locates it in attachment, endurance, and dreaming forward.

For Dickinson, the frequency of *know* cannot be overlooked. In the intellectual climate of nineteenth-century America, women were not easily recognized as authoritative voices in matters of knowledge. To declare “I know” is therefore both a statement and a claim: it pushes back against cultural assumptions that dismiss women’s authority in thought or expression. Her use of ‘*hear*’ and ‘*say*’ reinforces this position, pointing to a self that is not only aware but also engaged in communication, seeking recognition in dialogue. At the same time, verbs such as “*count*” and “*lose*” reveal a willingness to face absence and mortality directly. Rather than reducing her voice to silence, these words keep possibilities open by naming what is missing. As Ernst Bloch observed, even experiences of loss can sustain the “principle of hope,” because they insist on imagining what is absent as something that might one day be restored (1976, p. 217). Dickinson’s verbs, when read this way, embody what Vieira has called “prospective thinking,” the utopian habit of reaching toward horizons that cannot yet be fully grasped (2017, p. 29).

Glück’s verbs reflect a different orientation. Her most frequent *love* does not function as a private sentiment alone but as an act of defiance against alienation. In poems where isolation or fragmentation could dominate, “I love” asserts presence and continuity. The verbs *dream*, *live*, and *remember* extend this stance, refusing erasure and sustaining the subject through imagination and recollection. As Vieira has argued, utopian discourse requires a refusal of dominant ideologies (2017, p. 28). Glück’s verbs perform this refusal quietly but firmly: to remember in a world that forgets, to love when detachment is easier, is to resist the terms imposed on her existence. Eduardo Galeano’s description of utopia as “realities wishing to be born” (cited in Vieira, 2017, p. 31) resonates strongly here, since Glück’s dreaming gestures toward futures not yet realized but kept alive through language.

The significance of these findings lies in the way they show language functioning as a form of agency. The verbs do not merely fill lines of verse; they carry the work of survival and resistance. Dickinson’s *I know* and *I lose*, Glück’s *I love* and *I remember*, these are not incidental turns of phrase. These verbs are the linguistic acts that open space for the self where society denies it. In this way, the gardens in their poetry operate as experimental sites

where agency is rehearsed and sustained. Here, as Michel Foucault suggested in his description of heterotopias (1986, p. 24), alternative ways of living and imagining can be explored. For both poets, the garden is precisely such a site: a heterotopic and utopian space where even the smallest act of saying *I know* or *I love* preserves the hope of a life otherwise denied.

As the poems of Dickinson and Glück are not narrative poems, the regular close reading methods would not alone be enough to identify ways of verifying the existence of a utopian impulse. Although death might be considered as one of the biggest problems of utopia, Glück talks directly to it in one of her most famous poems, “The Wild Iris,” which is also part of the selected corpus for this dissertation:

THE WILD IRIS

At the end of my suffering
there was a door.

Hear me out: that which you call death
I remember.

Overhead, noises, branches of the pine shifting.
Then nothing. The weak sun
flickered over the dry surface.

It is terrible to survive
as consciousness
buried in the dark earth.

Then it was over: that which you fear, being
a soul and unable
to speak, ending abruptly, the stiff earth
bending a little. And what I took to be
birds darting in low shrubs.

You who do not remember
passage from the other world
I tell you I could speak again: whatever
returns from oblivion returns
to find a voice:

from the center of my life came
a great fountain, deep blue
shadows on azure seawater.

(Glück, 2022, p. 245)

From the first to the last line of the poem, the speaker defies death and claims the agency of her past and the future. Although the poem is clearly about death, it is not necessarily about mortality, but rather overcoming oblivion. In this garden-like setting, Glück unites nature, garden, and cemetery; the natural world is in direct, parallel connection to the spirit world, where the speaker lives “as consciousness/ buried in the dark earth”. Yet, the burial is no ending, as she reclaims the agency of her life and voice: “I tell you I could speak again: whatever/ returns from oblivion returns/ to find a voice”. From the center of the life of a speaker comes a great fountain, which is often symbolic of life and its continuation: the voice, shared with countless others who have heard and will hear the voice of the speaker. In the poem, the word and the ability to express the voice are put on the highest pedestal, as one of the most important aspects of one’s life. When Glück brings in the idea of seawater at the end of the poem, it is impossible not to connect it with Dickinson’s idea of always connecting the sea to gardens, such as in her poem “My Garden – like the Beach” (J484):

My Garden - like the Beach –
Denotes there be – a Sea –
That’s Summer —
Such as These – the Pearls
She fetches – such as Me

Ostrowska states that the “Garden,” or “hortus conclusus”, can be read as a metaphor for female self-awareness (Ostrowska, 1999, p.88). The claim “My Garden” also suggests that the space is created for the speaker, essentially for her pleasure. It is important to note that in this case, Dickinson connects the garden, which is essentially a closed space, to a Beach, and a Sea, open spaces that point outward to a horizon. In Vesela’s words, poetry can locate utopia not only in the future but also in “an immaterial space contemporaneous with the present” (Pavla Veselá, 2016, p. 80). Here, the garden does not simply mark enclosure, but becomes a threshold, like the beach, suggesting an “elsewhere” (the sea) that is both present and unreachable. The utopian impulse lies in the gesture: the garden is not self-contained but opens to an alternative space of possibility, where the speaker draws herself as a “Pearl”. Pearls are treasures hidden in the depths of the Sea, and they can only be revealed when brought to the surface. This resonates with what Glück explores in “The Wild Iris”, the idea of

voice, and the importance of hearing, remembering, and spreading the word. In this sense, a utopian impulse populates the gardens of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück. Living centuries apart, in a time and space unattainable for us, they exist as co-conspirators. Their voices are heard, their words, ideas, and poetry heard, seen, and remembered. Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück's representations of gardens mostly offer the space for converging. Thus, despite their differences, from a larger perspective, especially in relation to the utopian impulse, these gardens are spaces of convergence. These spaces unite Dickinson and Glück, and their vision are symbolically tied to each other through these spatial poetics.

Conclusion

This dissertation began with a simple question: How do Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück's representations of gardens converge or diverge in their spatial poetics? To answer this question, the study identified important connections that made these authors, as Glück described, co-conspirators. Their act of co-conspiracy is revealed through their shared themes, such as the exploration of identity, loss, love, and alienation, religious themes, and mortality, but most importantly, through the garden spaces, which allowed them to question their reality and claim agency. Connected by their genuine interest in gardening, which has historically been perceived as a female-centered space, Dickinson and Glück incorporated garden spaces into their poetry to explore the idea of perfection and the impossibility of ever reaching the ideal. These fictional gardens, created as parallel worlds, carried a heterotopic quality that later allowed for the creation of the utopian impulse. Thus, the act of co-conspiracy was formed between Dickinson and Glück, and also their readers, who can see the utopian vision behind these fictional spaces. This dissertation argues that these gardens function simultaneously as heterotopic and utopian sites. In these spaces, inherited cultural frameworks are tested, while hope and agency are preserved through language. As a result of this research, which combined close readings of garden poems with digital humanities tools, it became clear that although Dickinson and Glück differ in language and in how they approach similar questions, the very existence of their poetic gardens establishes a common ground. These gardens, created as spaces within a reality that denied both poets the freedom to fully explore their identities as individuals, women, and poets, ultimately emerge as spaces of union.

Although Dickinson and Glück led different lives in different times, their struggles were often similar, and both felt alienated from their realities. In her Nobel lecture, Glück described Dickinson as a "companion in invisibility," as her poetry spoke with Glück, who was experiencing the same issue stemming from the sense of alienation. The act of co-conspiracy, revealed through the shared space of gardens, becomes more significant in this context, as this process creates a web of connections among poets and their readers, who become part of these spaces and share a vision with each other and others.

The analysis has shown that the gardens of Dickinson and Glück cannot always be understood in simple terms of converging or diverging, as they reveal a dual function. As heterotopic spaces, they stand apart from ordinary life, suspending dominant norms and offering alternatives to the structures of gender, culture, and religion that constrained the poets. As utopian spaces, they generate hope and agency through linguistic gestures. Dickinson's verbs, "know," "hear," "say", embody an agency over one's space, past and future, but above all, individualism. Glück's verbs, "remember," "dream," "love", preserve continuity, resisting erasure through acts of memory and imagination, leaning into what Bloch termed the "not-yet." Both modes demonstrate that utopian energy emerges in persistence, in refusal, in the insistence that another orientation to life remains possible.

Ultimately, this dissertation has argued that Dickinson's and Glück's gardens resist closure. They are spaces that sustain tension, between solitude and relation, despair and hope, tradition and revision. In this refusal to settle lies their enduring strength. Just as the introduction described the poets and their readers as co-conspirators, the conclusion affirms that the gardens themselves invite co-conspiracy: shared spaces where meaning is created in relation, across time and circumstance. Dickinson and Glück leave their gardens open, and in that openness they extend to their readers a fragile but persistent invitation to hope.

When it comes to detecting a utopian function in poetry, scholars usually turn to narrative poems; however, the concept of utopia can't always be fixed and linear. As stated by Vieira in "The Concept of Utopia", utopia can be seen as a strategy:

By imagining another reality, in a virtual present or in a hypothetical future, utopia is set as a strategy for the questioning of reality and of the present. Taking mainly the shape of a process, refusing the label of an 'impossible dream', utopia is a programme for change and for a gradual betterment of the present; in that sense, it operates at different levels, as a means towards political, economic, social, moral and pedagogical reorientation. (p.23)

This perspective also covers the utopian impulse that is detected in the selected poems of Dickinson and Glück. When it comes to locating utopia in poetry, according to Pavla Veselá, it's important to consider that poetry can generate its own utopian visions (p.83). For instance, poet Charles Simic considered poetry to be utopian as it lets us enter the lost past (p.83), while in her analysis of the subject, Veselá uses the argument of Andrew Lawson,

claiming that: “modern poetry is both utopian prolepsis and a space “within the present . . . where a feasible future might grow,” both a “space of experience” and a horizon of expectation.” (1991:98). This is the case of the garden spaces in the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück.

By combining digital humanities tools with close reading, this dissertation has also brought methodological innovation to the study of poetic gardens. The computational analysis of first-person verbs confirmed specific tendencies that could have gone unnoticed without the close reading method: Dickinson leans toward verbs of projection, while Glück favors verbs of endurance. At the same time, the study has shown the limits of such tools. Verbs in isolation cannot capture the general mood that the author is trying to convey within the verse. Whether it is irony, rhythm, or tonal ambiguity, these elements remain central to the lived experience. At this stage of the study, these results determined the analysis of utopian function through the study of agency. For future exploration, digital analysis can be more inclusive of other elements of lived experiences and bring different layers to the research. At the same time, when studying the topic of Eden, distant reading can be used to identify terms, verbs, and descriptive words connected to the myth. This dissertation didn’t utilize digital humanities tools to identify such terms; however, for future research, this step could be completed.

This dissertation presents two figures generated by the R programming language: a word cloud and a bar graph for frequency analysis. For future research, the study could expand to include sentiment analysis, exploring the emotions present in the poetic gardens and their significance. However, considering the goal of this particular research, this level of visualisation was enough to provide the difference between the language of Dickinson and Glück and identify the patterns that lead to the utopian impulse. In this sense, the digital humanities tools were an addition for understanding the utopian function of the garden spaces.

While understanding the utopian function of the poetic gardens, the dissertation has also demonstrated that the garden is a cultural site deeply enmeshed in historical and religious narratives. Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück revised the Western utopian vision by utilizing the example of the Edenic Utopian ideal in their poetry. With questions posed to this ideal,

the poets insisted that the garden need not be a space of innocence lost, but can be a space where questions of identity, autonomy, and agency are explored and worked through. The exploration of the myth of Eden in the poetry of both authors was significant in understanding how they revised the Western Utopian ideal. Eden, in their poetry, was present not to replicate the promise of perfection, but to reimagine it in light of imperfection, knowledge, and mortality. Thus, while exploring the matter, it became clear that through these meditations on the matter, Dickinson and Glück break boundaries between nature and culture and destabilize the ideas that have been historically established over the centuries.

At the same time, the study acknowledges its boundaries. Beyond the Anglo-American canon, gardens have long been central to Persian, Arabic, and Japanese poetics, where they embody very different symbolic and cultural values. Comparative studies would extend the findings of this dissertation, testing whether the dynamics of hope and agency identified here are unique to Dickinson and Glück or shared across traditions. In the spatial poetics of Dickinson and Glück, gardens can be studied from different perspectives. One of the most important paths would be concentrating more on the relationship between poets and the readers by following Reader Response Theory. This study could also utilize digital humanities tools to identify specific patterns, and can be an example of qualitative or quantitative research. Additionally, the gardens can be explored from an ecological perspective, and can be a ground for yet another original comparative study between Dickinson and Glück.

There are diverse approaches that can make the exploration of these poetic gardens more introspective. However, with the selected corpus, this dissertation managed to identify the patterns that were not previously studied. It opened the door to the world of gardens of Emily Dickinson and Louise Glück, finding elements of both converging or diverging, while most importantly identifying the utopian impulse in a space that constantly seeks out and invites new co-conspirators.

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