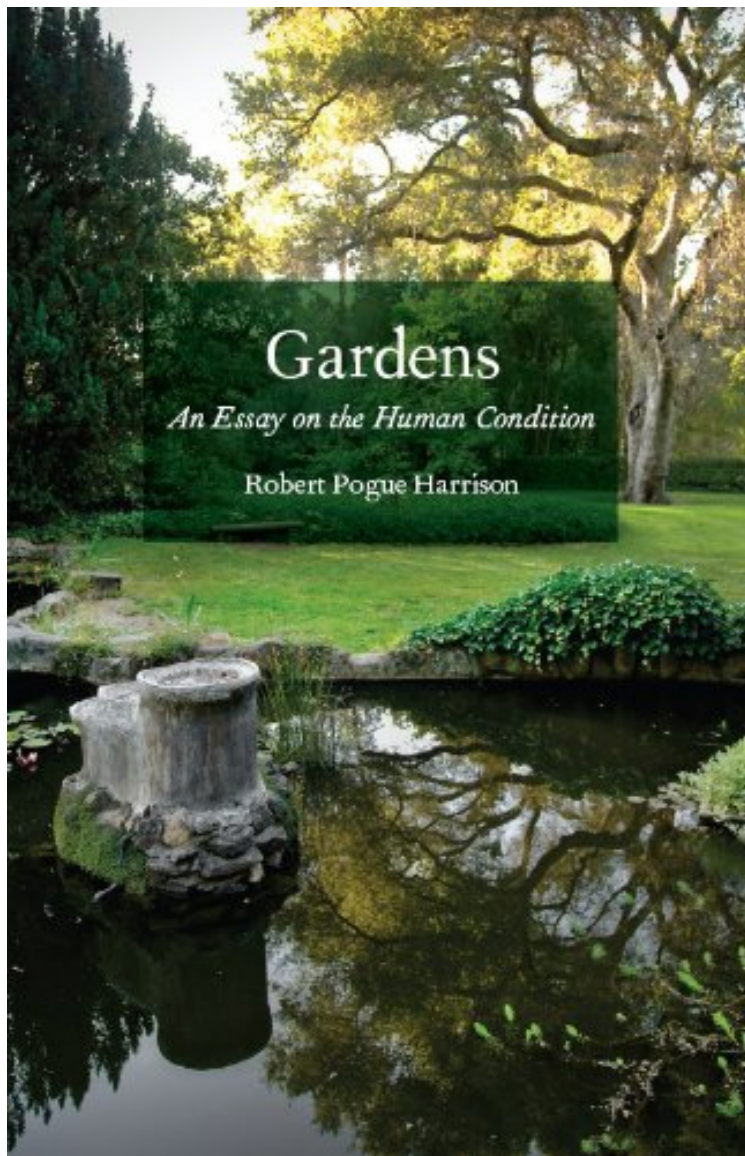


(Read now) Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition

Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition

Robert Pogue Harrison

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Robert Pogue Harrison : Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A magnificent essay by a wonderfully erudite writer with an unusual view of the role ...By Lois E. MeessenA magnificent essay by a wonderfully erudite writer with an unusual view of the role CARE of gardens plays in shaping our lives and culture.16 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Professor Harrison again provides insightBy Kenny BoxerAs in "Dominion of the Dead," Professor Harrison has taken

a topic (this time Gardens and our relations to them) and interwoven scholarship with stirring judgment. I am no gardener; this book can resonate with all who take up work and action to cultivate anyone or anything. The chapter on Care was particularly poignant. For example, on page 27, Harrison writes: "Care is accustomed to act, to take the initiative, to stake its claims, yet powerlessness and even helplessness are as intrinsic to the lived experience of care as the latter's irrepressible impulse to act, enable, nurse, and promote." If you have read and were moved by "Dominion of the Dead," or if you are one of the many listeners of his insightful radio show/podcast called "Entitled Opinions," or if you are one of us seeking for bold thinkers willing to powerfully interpret our current human condition, then sit down somewhere comfortable and open this important book. 26 of 27 people found the following review helpful. A garden of delights

By George Allan Harrison is insightful -- and inciteful -- in his exploration of the various kinds of gardens that are important to our sense of who we are, our self-understanding as members of Western civilization. He is erudite in the wealth of literary and philosophical materials from which he draws, but he writes clearly so what he has to say is very accessible to a reader without specialized knowledge about those materials. He has profound things to say about everyday gardens, about gardening in the literal sense of creating a place where flowers or other plants grow. He develops sometimes startling ideas about the meaning of gardens such as Eden's (thanks to Eve, we escaped its dehumanizing confines), Louis XIV's (Versailles imposes a deadening abstract human construct on the living vitality of nature), and Paradise (to be avoided). The garden of Epicurus is his recommended kind of garden: where we can learn patience, hope, and gratitude - the virtues that will save us from the frenetic denaturing extremes of our contemporary way of living. This is a wonderful book, as were Harrison's earlier books on the forest and on death.

Humans have long turned to gardens both real and imaginary for sanctuary from the frenzy and tumult that surrounds them. Those gardens may be as far away from everyday reality as Gilgamesh's garden of the gods or as near as our own backyard, but in their very conception and the marks they bear of human care and cultivation, gardens stand as restorative, nourishing, necessary havens. With *Gardens*, Robert Pogue Harrison graces readers with a thoughtful, wide-ranging examination of the many ways gardens evoke the human condition. Moving from the gardens of ancient philosophers to the gardens of homeless people in contemporary New York, he shows how, again and again, the garden has served as a check against the destruction and losses of history. The ancients, explains Harrison, viewed gardens as both a model and a location for the laborious self-cultivation and self-improvement that are essential to serenity and enlightenment, an association that has continued throughout the ages. The Bible and Quran; Plato's Academy and Epicurus's Garden School; Zen rock and Islamic carpet gardens; Boccaccio, Rihaku, Capek, Cao Xueqin, Italo Calvino, Ariosto, Michel Tournier, and Hannah Arendt all come into play as this work explores the ways in which the concept and reality of the garden has informed human thinking about mortality, order, and power. Alive with the echoes and arguments of Western thought, *Gardens* is a fitting continuation of the intellectual journeys of Harrison's earlier classics, *Forests* and *The Dominion of the Dead*. Voltaire famously urged us to cultivate our gardens; with this compelling volume, Robert Pogue Harrison reminds us of the nature of that responsibility and its enduring importance to humanity. "I find myself completely besotted by a new book titled *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition*, by Robert Pogue Harrison. The author . . . is one of the very best cultural critics at work today. He is a man of deep learning, immense generosity of spirit, passionate curiosity and manifold rhetorical gifts." Julia Keller, *Chicago Tribune* "This book is about gardens as a metaphor for the human condition. . . . Harrison draws freely and with brilliance from 5,000 years of Western literature and criticism, including works on philosophy and garden history. . . . He is as careful as well as an inspiring scholar." Tom Turner, *Times Higher Education* "When I was a student, my Cambridge supervisor said, in the Olympian tone characteristic of his kind, that the only living literary critics for whom he would sell his shirt were William Empson and G. Wilson Knight. Having spent the subsequent 30 years in the febrile world of academic Lit. Crit. . . . I'm not sure that I'd sell my shirt for any living critic. But if there had to be one, it would unquestionably be Robert Pogue Harrison, whose study *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, published in 1992, has the true quality of literature, not of criticism; it stays with you, like an amiable ghost, long after you read it. Though more modest in scope, this new book is similarly destined to become a classic. It has two principal heroes: the ancient philosopher Epicurus . . . and the wonderfully witty Czech writer Karel Capek, apropos of whom it is remarked that, whereas most people believe gardening to be a subset of life, gardeners, including Capek, understand that life is a subset of gardening." Jonathan Bate, *The Spectator*

From *Publishers Weekly* Drawing from sources religious, literary and scholarly, Italian literature professor Harrison examines the human quest for happiness through centuries of gardens and gardeners, both real and fictional: "For millennia and throughout world cultures, our predecessors conceived of human happiness in its perfected state as a garden existence." Gardens have provided education, creative expression and sanctuary throughout time, yet are "by nature impermanent creations that only rarely leave behind evidence of their existence." Epicurus was among those who taught by means of the garden, cultivating patience in his followers: "a serene acceptance of both what is given and what is withheld by life in the present." Other subjects include Homer, Camus, Dante and Boccaccio; what gardens in the Bible and the Qur'an say about attitudes toward life and afterlife; and the difficulty of perception in the

modern world ("We live in an age... that makes it increasingly difficult to see what is right in front of us"). A fitting follow-up to *The Dominion of the Dead*, his thoughtful look at mortality, Harrison's latest will give gardeners and nature-lovers a fascinating historical tour and a deeper appreciation for the craft: "Neither consumption nor productivity fulfills. Only caretaking does." Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From *Booklist*: In contemplating gardens, Harrison references works of literature to provide much perceptiveness about the human predicament. Gardening and actual gardens appear but fleetingly to limn larger ideas Harrison discerns in literary creations representations of gardens, including the biblical Eden. A superbly refined writer, Harrison regards care as a supreme attribute of the human relationship to gardens, in two senses. First, gardens are sanctuaries from worry and anxiety, and second, gardens are arenas of cultivation. Caretaking, whether literally of plants or figuratively of personal relationships and of the natural world, draws Harrison into epic poetry, Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, and Andrew Marvell's *The Garden*. The concept of the university as a pedagogical garden (Harrison is a professor) inspires the author's discussion of Plato's original grove of academe, while the garden as a refuge from modernism informs his consideration of certain twentieth-century poems and novels. Growth and decay, life and death, the purposes of human striving—such fundamental ruminations prompted by gardens receive a profoundly humanistic appreciation from Harrison, also the author of the comparable *Forests* (1992).

--Gilbert Taylor The years most thought-provoking, original, and weighty garden book is *Gardens*. . . . Reading Harrison's book is like strolling down a path through a well-cultivated, richly sown, light-dappled woodland. . . . Just as in the making of a garden, there's no end to the wonder; the journey is everything. (*New York Times Book Review*) "The rabbis of the Talmud counseled you that if you are planting a tree and someone tells you that the Messiah has come, you should finish planting your tree and then go out to investigate. Robert Pogue Harrison implies something similar in his rich and beguiling *Gardens*. Gardens, though they offer peace and repose, are islands of care, he writes, not a refuge from it. That is why they are important, since care is what makes us human. . . . In many ways *Gardens* is a personal essay as much as it is a work of scholarship. Mr. Harrison has planted his own garden of beautiful quotations and provocative speculation, and it is an absorbing and stimulating place to spend time."