



Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition

Robert Pogue Harrison

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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 Qur’an; 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 *Garden*

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