**Gardens of Refuge, Innocence, and Toil [[1]](#footnote-1)**

‘The world and I shall have nothing more to do with one another’

- Tao Yuanming

**Introduction**

A rhetoric of refuge and escape is a consistent feature of the world’s great garden traditions. Harold Nicolson – co-creator, with Vita Sackville-West, of Sissinghurst – called this garden ‘a succession of privacies’, offering a ‘series of escapes from the world’.[[2]](#footnote-2) What one wants to escape from, and how certain gardens enable it, are my questions in this chapter. While my focus is on the Chinese tradition, the aspirations of escape and refuge are enduring features of many garden cultures. I once had a green-thumbed neighbour, taciturn but prone to aphorism, who ~~once~~ explained to me that he finds in his garden what cannot ‘be reliably found any more in the world’. He mentioned calmness, care, and wholesomeness. On another occasion, my neighbour said his garden was a place to ‘remember’ how life ‘used to be’ for us and, perhaps, ‘how life should be’.

The connections between a desire for escape, need for refuge and disquieting sense that life is no longer what it ought to be gestures to a complex conception of garden appreciation. I explore these connections using Christian, Islamic, and Chinese garden traditions. In them one finds a conception of certain gardens as places of *moral refuge* from the corruption and failings of the mainstream world. Within the garden, one enjoys a sense of relief from that world – a world judged to have lost its way, as Daoists might say. Within garden refuges one might be able to recover from the travails of that world. In some of the traditions I discuss one may also experience some retrieval of a lost kind of moral innocence.

I begin with the idea of *gardens of refuge*.

# **Refuge**

Gardens are designed and appreciated for very many kinds of reasons—places to relax, exercise, be creative, cultivate new life, ‘commune with nature’, study, meditate or enjoy quiet time away from the world. Not all of these functions involve complex philosophical claims about human moral innocence or a misanthropic need for refuge. However, the deeper conceptions of gardens – as places of refuge – must be taken seriously. For one thing, a rhetoric of escape and refuge is still a feature of our garden-discourse. One might ‘escape’ into the garden – to water, prune, or sit with G&T – to cool down after a stressful day. However, there are other, less hedonistic senses of escape. David E. Cooper in an interesting paper describes a type of ‘sanctuary garden’, offering ‘a place of retreat or escape from the world outside’.[[3]](#footnote-3) Sanctuaries and refuges are hoped to be safe and secure, in contrast to dangers and threats posed by one’s current situation. The filmmaker Derek Jarman used his garden at Prospect Cottage as a refuge from illness, grief, and a hostile news media.[[4]](#footnote-4) Others find their gardens to be refuges from discouraging and oppressive aspects of life as it has come to be – a world of noisiness, ugliness, stress and demands. Many modern champions of ‘slow’ ways of life list gardening among the practices that help one to resist the ‘cult of speed’ overtaking modern life, alongside yoga, painting, making music, and *qigong*.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The objectionable aspects of the world which inspire a desire for refuge can include *moral harms*. By that term, I refer to attitudes, habits, and ambitions that, if internalised jeopardise one’s capacity to live a good life. Moral harms, in this sense, include restlessness, envy, greediness, selfishness, mindlessness and destructiveness. A restless person is perpetually agitated and dissatisfied, incapable of the cool quietude of someone at home in the world. A mindlessly destructive person harms plants, trees, birds, and insects – all failures of sensitivity, compassion, and wisdom. In the rhetoric of gardens of refuge, such moral harms are judged to be endemic to the mainstream human world. In its goals and ambitions and ethos, the critic sees entrenched failings and their consequences. Our ruthless, fractious world is fuelled by what the Buddha called the ‘unwholesome roots’ of greed, hatred, and delusion. The outcome are social and environmental catastrophes which harm humans, animals, and the natural world.

In *Gardens Through History*, William Adams says that the garden, once ‘a place for man to escape from the threats of nature’, afterwards became ‘a refuge from men’.[[6]](#footnote-6) Robert Pogue Harrison opens his ‘essay on the human condition’ by describing the garden as a ‘sanctuary’ from the ‘rage, death, and endless suffering’ of human life. A garden offers ‘a kind of haven, if not a kind of heaven’.[[7]](#footnote-7) My misanthropic neighbour would agree. In these testimonies, gardens – some kinds, anyway – are refuges from the moral harms endemic to modern life. It is this – not mere noise or turmoil – from which the wise seek refuge.

Gardens of refuge have three related functions. To start with they offer *respite*, restorative relief from the battering pressures, distractions and demands of mainstream life. In Roman gardens, those weary of public life enjoyed gardens as places of leisure and relaxation.[[8]](#footnote-8) A *villeggiatura* offered calm, peace, and quietude, of a sort impossible in the city. In Pliny the Younger’s villa in Tuscany, ‘there is no need for a toga, the neighbours do not come to call, it is always quiet and peaceful’. Palladio, likewise, spoke of gardens as refuges for ‘the spirit tired of the turmoil of the city’.[[9]](#footnote-9) In classical Greece, the community of Epicurus famously dwelt in the Garden, a perfect environment for a life of equanimity, in contrast to the oppressive ‘prison-house’ of city life.[[10]](#footnote-10) In China, similar themes of ‘respite’ echo in its garden writing. Ji Cheng appreciated gardens that offer ‘a pure atmosphere’.[[11]](#footnote-11) Chen Fuyao, a Qing dynasty scholar, enjoyed gardens that offered ‘protection against everything …most detrimental to the spirit’.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Such aspirations to self-seclusion are not symptoms of anti-social grumpiness. In classical Greece the desire to be alone was often pathologized, since most people regarded the energetic ethos of city life as the ideal *modus vivendi*.[[13]](#footnote-13) All the Roman, Greek, and Chinese garden-lovers just cited, however, could endorse the ideals of their societies—but still come to feel that sustained exposure to those societies would erode their virtues. Moreover, their need for respite was justified. Pliny the Younger, Tao Yuanming and Chen Fuyao all felt moral discontent due to long exposure to the corrupting pressures of the world.

The experience of respite from further damage matters but may not help with the damage done. A second function of gardens of refuge is therefore to enable *restoration*. The respite makes possible forms of moral repair – for ‘care of the self’.[[14]](#footnote-14) Our damaged moral virtues and crumpled sensibilities, finally protected from ongoing damage, can begin to heal. These days, this ideal of moral recovery is prone to be occluded by focus on the physical and mental health benefits of gardens.[[15]](#footnote-15) But there are moral senses of health and recovery, too. In his novel *Elective Affinities*, Goethe spoke of gardening as giving to life an ‘unruffled consistency’, as one does ‘precisely what needs to be done’, and nothing more.[[16]](#footnote-16) Wittgenstein, during a period of mental anguish, worked as a monastery gardener, which fulfilled a need for ‘regular work’ – not paid work, but a meaningful occupation able to give his emotionally fractious life the constancy and stability it lacked.[[17]](#footnote-17) In the Chinese tradition a favourite metaphor for moral restoration is washing off the ‘dust and grime’ of the world. Others associate restoration with awakening or liberation. The poet Tao Yuanming was able, in his garden, to go ‘back to nature’ – a place for ‘waking up’ to the true ‘meaning of life’.[[18]](#footnote-18) Sima Guang, the historian and writer, felt that, in his garden, life was at last ‘under [his] own control, alone and uninhibited’.[[19]](#footnote-19) Restoration, as a moral attainment, is here associated with being cleansed, awoken, and freed: no longer contaminated, insensible, or ‘inhibited’.

A third function of gardens of refuge is to afford spaces for *reflection* on one’s life. Such reflectiveness is a crucial aspect of a good life, for the European and Chinese figures cited so far. It also requires receptive conditions, ones that often characterise gardens. Ideally, reflectiveness requires an environment which is still—but not static; attractive—but not distractingly so; and constantly affording new and inspiration without being overstimulating. Cooper captures this delicate balance using Rousseau’s conception of *reverie.* This is not idle daydreaming. Reverie combines perception, memory, reflectiveness and expansive imaginativeness. In a reverie – like those richly described in Rousseau’s ‘solitary walks’ – our minds flow in unforced, spontaneous ways.[[20]](#footnote-20) Many environments are receptive to reverie, including some artificial ones, but the garden, argues Cooper, offers optimal ‘conditions conducive to *reverie*’.[[21]](#footnote-21) Gardens are familiar, calm, secure, attractive, and typically free from distractions and intrusions. In a garden, something is always happening to stir memories, prompt thoughts, and sustain imaginings.

Reflection relates to gardens of refuge in two ways. As some recent writers have reminded us, one can take refuge in the mind: in thoughts, ideas, philosophy, and contemplation.[[22]](#footnote-22) Not all refuges are places, let alone green ones. Gardens, as spaces for calm, repose, and *reverie*, can be spaces for reflection. A second connection is related to the themes of respite and restoration. Once I am undistracted, cleansed, and able to ‘wake up’ – perhaps for the first time in a long time – I am finally able to *reflect* on my life. The best-known expression of this hope is the best-known of Andrew Marvell’s poems on gardens, first published posthumously in 1681:

Fair Quiet, have I found thee here,

And Innocence, thy sister dear?

Mistaken long, I sought you then

In busy companies of men.

Your sacred plants, if here below,

Only among the plants will grow;

Society is all but rude

To this delicious solitude.[[23]](#footnote-23)

I suggest that the moral functions of gardens of refuge are to provide *respite* and enable *restoration* and *reflection*. In these gardens one finds refuge from the world’s aesthetic, moral and existential ills. One can recover and, at least for a time, as Tao Yuanming put it, ‘wake up’ to the ‘true meaning of life’. His poem *Home Again!* (*Gui qu lai ci*) is credited with establishing, in Chinese literary history, ‘the ideal of the home and garden as a personal retreat, haven, paradise, and world apart’.[[24]](#footnote-24) Such moral functions are consistent with accounts of the more prosaic benefits of gardens and gardening. As Susan Bowden-Pickstock emphasises, our activities in the garden can, if done properly, be ‘beneficial in a physical, mental, emotional, and even a spiritual sense’.[[25]](#footnote-25) In Chinese and Japanese traditions, those dimensions of life are understood to be interdependent. For a flourishing human being, ‘the aesthetic and the ethical are both bound up with the cultivation of mental and physical well-being’.[[26]](#footnote-26)

In a garden of refuge, one is protected from whatever erodes our capacities for virtue, peace, and flourishing. Moreover, one is able to recover and engage in reflection or *reverie*. If so, a harried person, damaged by the moral harms of the world, could desire to find or create their own garden of refuge. I worry, though, that, left at this, the account is too positive. Unless amended, it omits an important, if darker aspect of gardens of refuge.

To introduce this other aspect, I turn to the notion of *innocence*.

# **Innocence**.

In the famous Genesis account of creation, Adam and Eve were originally in a state of innocence. Satan, by tricking them into eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, destroyed that innocence. All this took place in a garden. Christian theology offers rich analyses of the nature of innocence and our potential for salvation. Without engaging in the intricacies of those reflections, I suggest that *innocence* is an apt term for reflection on the *limits* of gardens of refuge.

I suggested that a good garden of refuge, by virtue of its quietude and ambience, can offer respite from the hazards of the world and recovery from damage one suffers. While this may be right, there are two important limitations. The first is that respite and rejuvenation, in the relevant senses, are not always possible. Some pressures are too powerful, the noise of the world too overwhelming. Certain kinds of damage are also too severe to admit of recovery. This may be a pessimism in Wordsworth’s famous lament:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers

If our powers are ‘wasted’ to the point of atrophy, their restoration may be impossible. Zhuangzi exclaimed ‘How sad!’ when seeing people ‘entangled’ by the kinds of artificiality that ‘tie down Virtuosity’.[[27]](#footnote-27) The *Daodejing*, too, saw such people as having lost the Way, casting them into greed and violence.[[28]](#footnote-28) Wise people, said Zhang Heng, realise the Way is ‘benighted’, so retreat into their gardens to avoid the ‘dust and grime’ unavoidable in a life devoted to ‘worldly affairs’.[[29]](#footnote-29)

A problem with metaphors of being ‘entangled’, ‘tied down’, and ‘dust and grime’ is that they imply the possibilities of being freed, released, or cleansed. Of course, these refer to respite and restoration. A different set of metaphors are less encouraging. When the Buddha spoke of the world as ‘burning’ with the ‘fires’ of hatred and greed, he points to more permanent kinds of damage, as do his other images, like a leper frustratedly clawing at their sores. So, even in a near-perfect garden of refuge, one may find little respite and no recovery in the desired sense. The world, with its pressures and ugly realities, is ‘too much with us’, so one can never, in the fullest sense, experience ‘Fair Quiet’.

A second limitation, this time of the rejuvenation and reflection functions of gardens of refuge, refers us back to the initial desire to seek sanctuary. The reflections and the spontaneous *reveries* in a garden could take many forms – nostalgic reminisces, idle wonderings, warm hopes for the future, disinterested absorption in the busyness of birds. A person disappears into what Gaston Bachelard called ‘the space of elsewhere’ to gently follow its ‘reverberations’.[[30]](#footnote-30) Sometimes, however, *reveries*, even if following their own course, will lead us back to the dark vision of the world. Perhaps I find myself immersed, content in my garden, admiring the delicately determined flight of a butterfly. I wonder what its world is like, and if it seems as unworried as it seems—then am reminded of all the worries of my own life. Or during a *reverie* I reflect on the pleasure of ‘delicious solitude’, and idly wonder what experiences prompted Marvell himself to speak of ‘busy companies of men’ whose life is ‘all but rude’—then reflect on grimly similar experiences from my own life. In these cases, the reflections a refuge can enable naturally include, among their topics, the moral harms that led one to desire ‘escape’ in the first place.

The two limitations are closely connected. Aspirations to seek refuge are continuous with a sense of the harms or hazards of the human world. What one enjoys in a garden of refuge – contended calm, stillness, rejuvenation, peace, ‘delicious solitude’ – can also be experienced as absent from one’s wider life. Moreover, their absence is understood not as a product of one’s bad luck, but as a consequence of the demandingness and relentlessness of life. Put another way: what leads one into a garden of refuge can also bring one out of it, at least psychologically. If so, we can restate the connection between gardens of refuge and innocence. The moral harms of the world include an erosion of our moral innocence. In those gardens, one is reminded of modes of moral comportment uncorrupted by the failings of the world.

The theme of lost innocence is there in many classic accounts of gardens of refuge. Tao Yuanming’s fable of a man who stumbles into a hidden community of contented, peaceful people – ‘Peach Blossom Spring’ – has been said to voice ‘a universal longing for innocence and happiness’.[[31]](#footnote-31) That world is hidden, though, and its distinctive moral attractions seem to depend on its isolation – and difference – from wider society. By virtue of that isolation, the inhabitants are able to ‘preserve their purity and innocence’.[[32]](#footnote-32) In the Garden of Epicurus, one can cultivate equanimity and virtue, in ways impossible to most Athenians. Within the Garden, there are, by design, few inducements to selfishness, greed or hatred. Recall, for instance, the deliberate simplicity of the life of the Epicureans, for whom a ‘pot of cheese’ counted as a luxury. The virtuous life made possible in the Garden, then, entailed disciplined resistance to temptations that a morally innocent person would not experience, nor have to struggle against – resistance made easier by distance.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Lost innocence is a better metaphor for communicating this sense of lasting moral damage. Innocence is a quality that, once lost, cannot be regained. It can be destroyed by awful experiences or will naturally fade away as the growing child is initiated into the complexities of the world. Innocents, like children, spontaneously act kindly and honestly because it does not yet occur to them to do otherwise. It is temptation and the capacity for calculating ways of thinking that feed vices such as dishonesty and manipulativeness. This is the reason that innocent modes of moral comportment, as long as they last, are attractive. Innocent people are not yet subject to worldly temptations and pressures, effective resistance to which demands self-discipline and self-restraint.

I suggest that gardens of refuge can induce a sense of one’s lost moral innocence. When my neighbour spoke of remembering ‘how life used to be’, he referred, I suspect, to a kind of moral comportment now all but impossible except in very specific contexts and environments. Contented immersion in ways of engaging with the world in gentle, thoughtful, unselfish ways are possible in a ‘refuge’—but not beyond its walls. In Genesis, the Garden of Eden remained peaceful, even as the world beyond its borders became ‘cursed’ and a place of ‘thorns and thistles’ and, for humans, suffering, alienation and ‘painful toil’.[[34]](#footnote-34) In gardens of refuge, one has fleeting, fugitive intimations of that lost innocence.

The theme of innocence in relation to gardens of refuge should recall the ‘paradise gardens’, popular in the Islamic and Christian traditions of the 7th to the 13th centuries. The ideal paradise garden is lush, fertile and well-watered, as well as calm, orderly, and peaceful. It symbolises both nature and the human relationship to it – as originally intended by God.[[35]](#footnote-35) *Paridaeza* – an old Persian word – meant ‘walled garden’, a favourite Koranic image of Heaven.[[36]](#footnote-36) Life should have been hospitable and free of intruding moral discontent and any fear of corruption. Paradise gardens evoke a time when, as Milton puts it in *Paradise Lost*, living was ‘a delightful task’.[[37]](#footnote-37) Of course, these gardens also serve a second, darker purpose for Muslims and Christians. Eden, the site of our original sin, ‘reminds us of temptation, transgression, and loss’.[[38]](#footnote-38) Paradise gardens, by recalling our Edenic state, can also help us ‘anticipate heaven, to which [one] should aspire’.[[39]](#footnote-39) Experiences of paradise gardens are shaped by a postlapsarian image of humankind as corrupted – ‘fallen’ beings incapable of true happiness in worldly life, albeit destined to enjoy it after death. As Carolyn Merchant neatly summarises the story:

The Christian story is marked by a precipitous fall from a pristine past. The initial lapsarian moment, or loss of innocence, is the decline from garden to desert as the first couple is cast from the light of an ordered paradise into a dark, disorderly wasteland to labour in the earth.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Here is a specific conception of a garden of refuge, shaped by monotheistic religion. It connects gardens to ‘retreat, contemplation, and repose’ but with a ‘darker resonance’ owing to the themes of‘fallenness’, lost innocence, and moral disaster.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Paradise gardens are tied to the doctrines and narratives of Christianity and Islam—or, better, to specific variations within those rich religious traditions. Not all Christians see the Fall as the annihilation of our moral innocence. St. Aquinas was less pessimist about this than St Augustine, for instance. However, the rich connections between gardens of refuge, moral innocence and human corruption are not unique to Islamic and Christian discourses. Similar themes are also explored further east in Chinese garden traditions.

# **Toil**.

The schools of the classical period of Chinese philosophy, for all their differences, shared a profound sense of moral and cultural decline. The nature and causes of decline, and the best means of response, were matters of debate. The ‘Agriculturalist School’ (Nongjia), one of the Hundred Schools of the classical period of Chinese philosophy, told a story of early and simple ways of life – small communities of people, bound together by trust and mutual acquaintance. Life was less complex. Desires were modest and attainable by hard work mainly done by shared labour. There was no war, complex governance or hubristic confidence in human powers. Life proceeded without ‘rewards or punishments, commands or restrictions’, for it was recognised that these are ‘a means to disorder’. Over time, this way of life deteriorated. Men became ‘shameless and careless’, an appetite for ‘gain’ corrupted their hearts, until disorder became ‘inevitable’.[[42]](#footnote-42)

In the texts gathered under the label ‘Daoism’, one finds similar themes. The anonymous authors of the poetic classic, the *Daodejing*,and the book named for Zhuāngzǐ lament our decline form an earlier condition of simplicity and moral innocence. The unknown authors of the *Daodejing* describe a proliferation of rules, desires, regulations, appetites, and ambitions that corrupt people, who became ‘cunning’, hypocritical, arrogant and exploitative.[[43]](#footnote-43) The Inner Chapters of the book of Zhuangzi – the ones most likely authored by him – lament our inflexibility and ‘calculating’, rigid ways of thinking and our inflexibility.[[44]](#footnote-44) Instead of humble and attentive engagements with people and animals, most people prefer to ‘impose’ and ‘contend’ on them, including even well-meaning people, who inevitably ‘end up tearing the world to pieces’.[[45]](#footnote-45)

The Agriculturalist and Daoist schools agree on many general details of this narrative of decline, even if they are marked by considerable disagreement and diversity. Some of schools of the classical period offer their own narratives of decline, but of a different sort. Confucians and Mohists, while agreeing on the lamentable state of the world, come to different conclusions. Confucians lamented the deterioration of rituals and traditional cultural arts, whereas the Mohists criticised the warlikeness and elitism of Chinese society and the suffering it caused the common people. Others, such as Hanfeizi, rejected the preoccupation with ‘the ways of the ancients’, since the problems of the present differ too much from those of the past.[[46]](#footnote-46) So, while most of the Chinese schools experienced their world as being in moral crisis, not all are keen to connect that to a sense of decline from an earlier period of innocence.

The Agriculturalist and Daoist narratives of decline are related to gardens, however, in instructive ways. What one finds in those texts are appreciations of the edifying power of natural environments lacking or less prominent in the other schools. The Nongjia – named for Shénnóng, the ‘divine farmer’ – were pastoralists who caringly worked the land. In the ‘Daoist’ case, this is truer of the *Zhuangzi* than the *Daodejing* – the latter too terse anyway to dictate definitive interpretations. But into the later Daoist philosophical and religious tradition there is a marked appreciation of the importance, to a good life, of engagements with natural places and creatures.[[47]](#footnote-47) Some admirers have described Daoists as ‘gardeners of the cosmos’, a figurative term meant to capture their commitment to modes of relating to natural creatures and places marked by skill, sensitivity and understanding.[[48]](#footnote-48) Such people aspire to ‘slowly shape their life and environment’, appreciatively alert to an intimacy of ‘human activity and the order of nature’.[[49]](#footnote-49) While this is the ideal it has become increasingly difficult for humans, who become ever-more complex and artificial. In a sense, there has been a shift from our being *gardeners* to *technologists* – to hubristic beings who ‘set on’ and exploit what we would once have nurtured and cultivated.[[50]](#footnote-50)

The sense of innocence, decline, and appreciation of natural environments, including ‘humanised’ ones, like gardens, echoes throughout the later Chinese tradition. As historians of Chinese literature emphasise, Daoist writings exerted enormous influence on later poetry and landscape art. Much of this took place in gardens of refuge. Ji Cheng wrote in the *Yuanye* (‘The Craft of Gardens’) of 1631 of his desire for a well-constructed garden, offering ‘a pure atmosphere around our tables and seats [so that] the common dust of the world is far from our souls’.[[51]](#footnote-51) Sima Guang (1019-86) created his ‘garden of solitary delight’ in which, for a time at least, he could live ‘uninhibited’.[[52]](#footnote-52) The scholar-recluse, Zheng Yuanxun, created his ‘Garden of Reflections’ as a retreat where he could devote himself to care of his elderly mother and study of his books. Invoking the respite theme, Zheng contrasted the caring and gentle activity of ‘watering the trees and the flowers’ with febrile worldly anxieties about ‘establishing merit and making a reputation’.[[53]](#footnote-53) In these and other testimonies a garden of refuge offers an environment which enables and recalls more innocent kinds of moral comportment.

In some Chinese poetry these experiences are tinged by moods of resignation, nostalgia, and lament. One feels this in poetry of Wang Wei (699–759):

In old age I ask for peace

and don’t care about things of this world

I’ve found no good way to live

and brood about getting lost in my old forests.

The wind blowing in the pines loosens my belt,

the mountain moon is my lamp while I tinkle

my lute.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Gardens of refuge, when reflected on, can induce a series of moods. These include a poignant sense of our lost moral innocence, a longing nostalgia for former ways of being-in-nature, and a misanthropic sense of the awful moral condition of humankind. One could express this in a sense of the *moral toil* – the demanding moral work – of modern life. In an overactive world of constraints, demands, trade-offs, temptations and pressures it becomes ever harder to cultivate, exercise, and protect our virtues. Life becomes *harder* in ways that were not features of our innocent life. As Adam and Eve found, existence outside Eden is hard work—a point that can be detached from its specific theological articulation. *Moral toil* implies kinds of moral comportment that are difficult, stressful and often unrewarding. It conveys a sense of our moral life as *hard*, imperilled, far from the ‘delightful task’ that, for Milton, it used to be. In a garden, at least for a time, it becomes possible for a reflective person to experience and appreciate those more innocent forms of moral life.

A sceptic might reply that these claims about gardens, refuge and moral innocence are too ‘high-falutin’, a pretence that our time in a garden is a matter of existential drama. Such scepticism is typical of those unaware or unable to realise the moral and spiritual resonances of gardens across many of the world’s cultures. Several hours spent perusing work on the philosophy and theology of gardens should correct that obliviousness. In any case, there are many testimonies to these ways of experiencing and understanding gardens, including among contemporary gardeners. Other than my neighbour, the American-Canadian author, Ruth Ozeki, in her book *All Over Creation* has a character – a Japanese-American woman – whose heart ‘crack[s] open’ at all the ‘hopeless beauty and fragility and loss of all that is precious on earth’. This experience occurs in a Californian greenhouse – airconditioned, artificial – which recalls and contrasts with her Hawai’ian childhood home to which she cannot return. Her youth – unhurried and unworried, calm and happy – was a place and a time when ‘everything is a garden’.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Appreciation of gardens of refuge incorporates a sense that they enable kinds of moral comportment which recall, however dimly, a more innocent life. In these gardens, the corrupting imperatives of the world are absent, enabling a welcome experience of respite and rejuvenation. In certain moments, however, one may be led into reflections and *reveries*, and from there back into reflection on the moral harms and toil of the world beyond the garden wall.

**Conclusions.**

In a remark widely-quoted in the philosophy of gardens, Yuriko Saito once said a Zen garden offers a ‘glimpse of the world as it appears to a Zen-enlightened sensibility’.[[56]](#footnote-56) ‘Glimpse’ is the right word—a brief, fleeting sighting of something passing by, or perhaps passing away. The Southern Chan School of Buddhism, initiated by Huineng, emphasised gentleness, spontaneity, humility and these passed into the later Zen tradition of Japan.[[57]](#footnote-57)

While in practice this was physically demanding, requiring perseverance and self-discipline, it was informed by a sense of innocence, spontaneity, and gentle responsiveness. I think this is what my neighbour meant when explaining that he finds in his garden what he can no longer ‘reliably find’ in the world: echoes of morally innocent life characterised by what David E. Cooper calls the ‘quieter’ virtues – peacefulness, contentedness, stillness, quietude, gentleness, loving care, and an unforced sense of *intimacy* between the human and the natural.[[58]](#footnote-58) These innocent ways may once have prevailed in the world, but have now, alas, become so difficult, in a world of toil, that they could only really be ‘remembered’. Such realisation brings with it an abiding set of moods – poignant, melancholic, pessimistic, even misanthropic.[[59]](#footnote-59) Refuges are made or sought to protect us against a hostile world, one of toil and corruption. Sometimes, however, a refuge cannot in the end protect itself against that world.

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