



# The Decadent Gardener (Dedalus Literary Concept Books)

*Durian Gray, Medlar Lucan*

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"There is an odd, subversive book called *The Decadent Gardener* by Medlar Lucan and Durian Gray. The introduction describes the decadent gardening ethos thus: 'In the garden, the decadent seeks to create a moment of beauty, which should be allowed to fall into decay and ruin.' Gardening, Lucan and Gray believe, is 'little more than systematic violence in pursuit of beauty', and the gardener is first and foremost a sadist. These two, the Kropotkin and De Sade of horticulture, understand that nowhere are sex and death more intimately bound together than in the garden.' For them the garden is a place of 'agony, self-doubt and betrayal.' They remind us that, if we are to believe the Bible - not that they would be inclined to - the first murder was carried out by a gardener. And the first garden was a place where sin beckoned wherever you turned. The book abounds with piercing, pricking truths. The flower, they remind us, for example, is nothing but a sexual organ. The Decadent Garden consists of the plans for a series of thematic gardens that Lucan and Gray had conceived for a wealthy patroness. Each garden would symbolise an aspect of nature as they saw it. The Cruel Garden would consist largely of impenetrable thickets of thorns. The Fatal Garden would contain only representatives of the vegetable world's many poisonous denizens: among them, black bryony, dropwort and, of course, deadly nightshade. In the Narcotic Garden, by the side of the opium poppy and cannabis sativa, would grow more obscure mind-altering plants such as mandrake, henbane and thornapple. The Priapic Garden would be populated by those species whose flowers and foliage assumed the most suggestive phallic and vulvic shapes. Their Torture Garden carried the libertine ideas of Lucan and Gray furthest and is perhaps best left to the reader's imagination. Because Lucan and Gray barely realised their designs (they were too decadent to bother), their gardens flourish mainly in the mind."

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