

attempt to blend religious and secular polarities and Belliotti discloses a lot of himself in an existential fashion, something I am grateful for.

I would recommend this book, with a caveat. I do not think that those who just want a detailed engagement with existentialism need read it. It may be the case that Belliotti does a disservice to Dante's work, something I feel not able to really critique at this moment. The book is well written, enjoyable, clear and well argued in what it does bring, and ultimately the author largely achieves what he set out to – it prompted my thought process and raised enough questions to want to learn more.

Ben Scanlan

The Well Gardened Mind : Rediscovering nature in the modern world

Sue Stuart-Smith, 2021. London: William Collins.

The central message of *The Well Gardened Mind* is that working or being in a garden is generally good for our psychological health and well being. It can be healing for sick, severely injured or traumatised people. The author of this book, Sue Stuart-Smith, is a Consultant Psychiatrist who worked until 2015 in the NHS as a Lead Clinician for Adult Psychotherapy. She is currently a Senior Clinical Lecturer at the Tavistock & Portman NHS Foundation Trust.

The benefits of gardens/gardening accrue from engaging and working with nature on her terms. Gardens cannot be hurried. They develop and grow according to the seasons and weather conditions. We can assist but have to accept our limitations, rather like working with clients. Indeed, gardening can be a spiritual experience, reminding us of our connection to the universe and dependency on the sun, Earth and moon.

She considers that trees provide structure and a sense of permanence, they can make us feel secure and protected. As William Blake said, “the tree which moves some to tears of joy is [for others] only a green thing which stands in the way“ (p265). For some, gardening is just another pile of jobs and demands on their time. As with therapy we have to be open to the experience and for some it will never be their cup of tea.

Stuart-Smith marshals various sources of evidence as to how gardening works for us on a neurological and emotional level to relieve anxiety, grief, trauma and offers transformation and hope. She says, and I agree, there can be a meditative experience when immersed in gardening that enables sorting things in your head while absorbed in digging, pulling up weeds or planting seeds, with attention directed outside oneself. This kind of relaxed immersive attention gives the brain a rest and restores mental energy.

She invokes several notable philosophers and therapists who found comfort and joy in their gardens. There is Jung who grew his own potatoes and spoke of a “malaise of uprootedness” and a need to reconnect with the “dark maternal, earthy ground of our being” (p132), and Montaigne, who stated that we need to see death as something ordinary. He hoped to die in his garden while planting his cabbages. The neurologist Oliver Sacks took his patients for garden walks, saying that music and gardening both have calming and organising effects on our brains.

In the nineteenth century, the designer of New York’s Central Park proclaimed the benefits of being outdoors with the words “beautiful natural scenery employs the mind without fatigue and yet exercises it; tranquilises it and yet enlivens it” (p91). He suggested it as a remedy for the many nervous afflictions suffered by city dwellers. Having recently reclaimed my northern credentials after returning to the northwest of England, I enjoyed being reminded that he took inspiration and ideas from Birkenhead Park which had already been established for the local townspeople to enjoy and relax in. Central Park was opened in 1847 and is considered to be the first publicly funded civic park in the world.

Existential consolation in nature – the cycle of life, creation and destruction, winter deaths and spring rebirth where things happen as they will, often arbitrarily – is an aspect that was especially important to me during decades of city and deadline-driven business life. Diving into the garden at weekends and getting lost in the simple pleasures of life, creating my own 3D artwork and filling up the compost bin with all my garden foes was always a joy.

Gardens can remind us of temporality and also provide opportunity for generativity. One of the consolations of nearing the end of your life is creating something that will live beyond your tenure, such as planting a tree that you will never see in its full glory for instance, or a beautiful rose bed that may outlive you. It is like the pleasure and reward I get these days from the supervision of trainees who are at the beginning of their therapist-lives.

Stuart-Smith relates some poignant stories about gardening in the trenches (on both sides of the frontlines) during the First World War. These started out small, growing flowers first and then vegetables; by 1918 the Western Front was self-sufficient in fresh produce. From the ashes of that conflict emerged the first trauma hospitals and the beginnings of using the power of nature for recovery. It also led to ideas, now employed in gardens for long-term patients with, for example, spinal injuries, that exposure to the air, birds, sights and the touch of plants, significantly aided the recovery process.

She mentions various gardening projects that have been set up specifically to help people in the community and in prisons with mental health issues to help move them move on from negative self-belief and behavioural difficulties. She notes that being outdoors in the sunlight and exercising boosts serotonin while contact with soil contains bacteria that also raises serotonin levels and

has a beneficial effect on gut bacteria. Green is seen as a soothing colour while the various scents in the garden can have a calming or uplifting effect. Lavender, in particular, raises the levels of serotonin.

Urban projects like Incredible Edible in the UK have been transformative, introducing greenness and beauty into what had been forlorn, concrete landscapes. They have led to increased community cohesion and reduced anti-social behaviour and vandalism.

New to me were some ideas about how gardening took off. A current one is that it may have started before farming as a way of growing and ensuring the supply of highly prized foods for special occasions, such as medicines and hallucinogens. There is evidence that figs, avocados, chillies and fruit trees were cultivated before staples like maize.

Certainly, Stuart-Smith's case for taking up gardening is well made, but there are plenty of people for whom it does not appeal and there are other ways to obtain similar benefits. She notes that fishing and bird watching also provide an opportunity to slow down to nature's time and enjoy the great outdoors.

She has drawn together much information from a wide range of sources that will provide interest for many readers. That said, the book is often repetitive and a bit muddled. I feel it would have benefitted from more editing and reorganising. Nonetheless, there are some intriguing nuggets of information and lots to enjoy if you do not mind the somewhat rambling style.

On climate change and loss of habitats, she notes encouragingly that domestic gardens can act like hotspots of biodiversity with a wealth of species far greater than in the surrounding countryside. The density of birds in city gardens can be six times higher than the average for the country as a whole. This is a cheering thought indeed to end with and well worth knowing.

Diana Pringle

The Industrialisation of Care: Counselling, psychotherapy and the impact of IAPT

Catherine Jackson & Rosemary Rizq (eds.), 2019. Monmouth: PCCS Books.

This is a horror story. More than that, it is a grim, relentless journey through a wasteland of, well...waste. If you faint at the sight of misshapen public funds, butchered therapeutic practices, dismembered health services, rotting economic ideologies and the living dead of bureaucracy, then look away now.

The story begins in 2003 when the economist Richard Layard, wading well out of his depth into thinking about psychotherapy, met David Clark, an academic psychologist stuck far up in the ivory towers and also unfamiliar with therapeutic practice despite a filing cabinet full of research papers.