

= The Ash Garden =

The Ash Garden is a novel written by Canadian author Dennis Bock and published in 2001 . It is Bock 's first novel , following the 1998 release of Olympia , a collection of short stories . The Ash Garden follows the stories of three main characters affected by World War Two : Hiroshima bombing victim Emiko , German nuclear physicist Anton Böll , and Austrian @-@ Jewish refugee Sophie Böll . The narrative is non @-@ linear , jumping between different times and places , and the point of view alternates between the characters ; Emiko 's story being written in the first person while Anton and Sophie 's stories are written in the third person . Bock took several years to write the novel , re @-@ writing several drafts , before having it published in August 2001 by HarperCollins (Canada) , Alfred A. Knopf (USA) and Bloomsbury (UK) .

Critics gave it mostly positive reviews and it became a best @-@ seller in Canada . It was nominated for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award , the Books in Canada First Novel Award , and the Kiriya Prize . It has been analysed in several literature journals , including Canadian Ethnic Studies which noted the similarities between the character Emiko and the Hiroshima Maidens .

= = Background = =

At the time of publication , author Dennis Bock was 36 years old and living in Toronto . He had previously published a book of short stories called Olympia , but struggled with this project that would become his first novel , taking several years to write the novel . Doubleday Canada originally owned the rights but Bock withdrew the book from Doubleday citing " a difference of opinion " between himself and the editor . He had written two drafts , including one in which the main character was an art historian involved in art theft and looting during World War II . With a working title of A Man of Principle , Bock gave the draft to editor Phyllis Bruce in 1999 and sold it to Knopf for US \$ 250 @,@ 000 . He re @-@ wrote most of the book with the help of Bruce , and two other editors , Gary Fisketjon of Knopf and Liz Calder of Bloomsbury (who published the book in the UK) .

= = Summary = =

The narrative alternates between three characters (Emiko , Anton and Sophie) and takes place around the fiftieth anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima , though the back story of each character is told . Emiko was a small girl living in Hiroshima with her parents , younger brother , and grandfather during WWII . Following the atomic bombing , with her parents dead , Emiko and her brother recover in a hospital and her grandfather cares for patients . Though her brother dies , Emiko travels to the United States as part of a group of girls receiving reconstructive surgery . On the way , the American media takes an interest in the girls and she appears on an episode of This Is Your Life thanking the American audience for bringing her to the US . She later becomes a documentary filmmaker and , in 1995 , approaches Anton Böll to be part of a new project .

Anton was a scientist in Nazi Germany who , following a disagreement regarding the direction of its nuclear program , is recruited by the US and flees via France , Spain , and Portugal . He becomes a part of the Manhattan Project , witnesses the tests , and travels to Hiroshima recording the aftermath . Anton regrets the consequences of the atomic bombs , attends the Pugwash Conference , but maintains his belief that it was necessary to end the war and prevented more deaths . He marries Sophie and becomes a professor at Columbia University in New York . With Sophie , he retires to a small town outside of Toronto .

As WWII was beginning , Sophie 's Jewish parents sent her away from Austria . She was on board of the MS St. Louis when it was turned away from Cuba and sent to the United Kingdom . She was living in a refugee camp in Canada when she met Anton . She was diagnosed with lupus and takes up gardening , planning elaborate landscapes every year . In 1995 , after refusing further medical treatments , and with Anton by her side , she succumbs to the disease .

After Sophie 's funeral Anton reveals to Emiko the extent to which he had been involved in Emiko 's life . He first met her while volunteering at the hospital in which her grandfather was working . Feeling he had to make amends in some way , he ensured that Emiko was on the list of girls to get reconstructive surgery , and secretly filmed her at memorial events . He had been waiting for her to find him .

= = Style and themes = =

The portions of the book that follow the character Emiko Amai is written as a first @-@ person narrative , while the portions following Sophie and Anton Böll use the third @-@ person . The tone was described as " disturbingly calm " . Its central theme is that of identity and attempts to find solace . Bock states " All three of the main characters in *The Ash Garden* are refugees who don 't belong anywhere . Each has a desperate search for home . " In *Harper 's Magazine* , Pico Iyer compares *The Ash Garden* with Michael Ondaatje 's *The English Patient* as " a book that ends where Bock 's begins " . An essay in the journal *Canadian Ethnic Studies* , looked at *The Ash Garden* from the a Japanese historical perspective , finding strong similarities between the real @-@ life Hiroshima Maiden Shigeko and the character Emiko , but noting it was not a roman à clef .

= = Publication and reception = =

The book was released as a hardcover on August 25 , 2001 , published by HarperCollins in Canada , Alfred A. Knopf in the United States , and Bloomsbury in the United Kingdom . Knopf ordered an initial print run of 60 @, @ 000 copies . It debuted at the # 2 spot on the *Macleans* 's fiction bestseller list and peaked at # 1 in late September and early October . It was translated and published in multiple languages , including Japanese and German . The book was a finalist for the 2001 for the Books in Canada First Novel Award , as well as the Kiriya Prize , an international literary award for promoting greater understanding of the Pacific Rim and South Asia . It was nominated by the Vancouver Public Library and the Bergen Public Library for the 2003 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award .

In *Time* , Brian T. Bennett wrote , " *The Ash Garden* may not be a page @-@ turner , but Bock 's prose lures the reader along through smooth , sculpted sentences full of rich detail and subtle meditation . " In *Macleans* 's magazine , Brian Bethune wrote , " Intellectually engaging , beautifully written and powered by three memorable characters , *The Ash Garden* will seduce anyone who reads it . " In the *Christian Science Monitor* , fiction critic Ron Charles wrote " Bock moves back and forth through time in a series of exquisite scenes , always keeping his vision tightly focused , despite the world @-@ altering events he describes What makes the novel so compelling and disturbing , though , is its emotional restraint . " Regarding the quality of the prose , a review in the *Quill & Quire* said " Bock 's writing is both dense and immensely readable " while the review in *Library Journal* " highly recommended " it . In *Books in Canada* one reviewer highlighted that on " occasions , the prose turns mannered and clichés pop up " . though a later review by W. P. Kinsella called it a " brilliant novel ... [with] superb plot twists that make it a spellbinding adventure in reading " .

A Japanese review in the *Yomiuri Shimbun* noted " something inaccessible about all three [characters ... who are] as remote to each other as they [are] to the reader , and thus are never truly empathetic " . The review in *The New York Times* by literary critic Michiko Kakutani called it " an elegant , unnerving novel " but that Bock " tries too hard to underscore those links by using leitmotifs to connect his characters ' experiences " . In London , the review in *The Sunday Telegraph* was more critical , finding it " is badly let down by its form , a split @-@ time @-@ scale narrative ... [and] is significantly short of narrative dynamism " , while novelist Amanda Craig concludes that it " reads as the work of a young writer who is straining with too much effort " .