



## **A Garden of Sand**

*Earl Thompson*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# A Garden of Sand

*Earl Thompson*

## **A Garden of Sand** Earl Thompson

Destitution, hunger, cruelty, rootlessness-all the odds stand against Jacky, the young boy at the center of this powerful, popular American classic, yet still he prevails. Resourcefully, doggedly, Jacky nurtures his spirit of independence, his capacity to love, and his faith in a nation's dream in a journey that takes him from Wichita to Corpus Christi and from poverty to possibility.

## **A Garden of Sand Details**

Date : Published August 13th 2001 by Da Capo Press (first published 1970)

ISBN : 9780786709465

Author : Earl Thompson

Format : Paperback 544 pages

Genre : Fiction, Mystery, Noir, Novels

 [Download A Garden of Sand ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online A Garden of Sand ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online A Garden of Sand Earl Thompson**

---

## From Reader Review A Garden of Sand for online ebook

### ALLEN says

A GARDEN OF SAND is the double-dog-dare-ya of American naturalism. Earl Thompson's 1970 masterwork, while much better written than the usual 1960s/70s "sprawler," exploits themes that seem too rough for even a Dust Bowl coming-of-age saga. Even so, Jacky, a boy on the cusp of manhood and Oedipality, engages our sympathy and does not seem like a "type" in the Dreiser tradition. If your taste in American naturalism extends beyond *The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan*, give this one a try. However, remember what one college history teacher told me ca. 1980: "I'd love to assign this. It says so much about the Depression and what people had to do to survive. But I think even today, many of my students would object." You were warned!

A GARDEN OF SAND sold like hotcakes in paperback in the boundary-pushing Seventies; today, used copies take a bit of looking for. Antiquarians: if you run across a hardbound copy in good shape, it's rare -- snap it up at a good price. Sequel to A GARDEN OF SAND: TATTOO (1974), which takes the now young-adult author/protagonist into World War II, and along with the war come a renewed emphasis on grit and sex.

---

### Bill Myers says

"Raw". How an author has the courage to write something like this is beyond me. This is the first of four books by Earl Thompson. He followed this with "Tattoo" and "Caldo Largo." The fourth book, which I did read and cannot recall the title, was a complete departure from the first three in every way save that it, too, was autobiographical. His descriptions of life during the Depression are incredibly vivid and real. Thompson died not long after the fourth book was published and I don't think he ever recieved the critical kudos he was due. "Garden of Sand" is honestly in a class by itself.

---

### Julian says

A classic of it's era, sexuality explicit and politically and socially challenging, just like the 60s were...

---

### Jennifer says

I was very surprised at how this book was able to make me sincerely care about the main characters despite their often times horrible natures. The atmosphere is oppressive and at every turn, I could feel the harshness of the world and the complex and difficult choices each had to make. While one moment I hated the mother, the next I felt extremely compassionate towards her. The main character, the son is also one of those characters that will make you hate and sympathize with him. There are parts of this novel that are very

graphic and not for the more sensitive reader or those that have difficulty with strong/violent sexual scenes. It is certainly one of those novels that stick with you, something akin to *Sofie's Choice*. Worth the read for sure, but be ready for some concepts that might shock you.

---

## wally says

picked this one the other day....and here i go! 11/12/11....woooo....cue the twilight zone soundtrack!

like has been said elsewhere it is unfortunate that this man's stories are not better known. this one reads easy, haven't had to do a lot of double-backing and even when that happens it is as much the problem of our time as it is the story...maybe even more so.

kansas...fdr is in the white house...the story moves from one character to another...mac--this old man married to a good woman and their daughter wilma gives birth to jacky...we look at the world through jacky's eyes a time or two.

*there came a loud, thigh-slapping, black-haired woman from st. louis in a '29 ford, with a boy that should have been weaned long ago fastened to her big breast, a hole in the muffler, and a boot in every bald tire...the boy stared at her there at the kitchen table, her pig-faced brat, claude, sucking on the biggest, whitest tit he had ever seen. claude was as big as himself. he was amazed.*

i guess the world was not ripe for this at the time? or was too busy protesting the war or feeling groovy? there have been things like this and more so, up to page 137 in this 500+ page story...some nasty stuff about a midget using his teeth...think jeffrey dahmer or worse or just as bad or something.

there's some stuff that has passed, like the old man ma wears some sort of cotton string/rope on his wrist and ankles to ward off the rheumatism. things that are no more...or less...i believe i read in *this stubborn soil* things of that nature...as well in a story from this finnish writer...guy who wrote *our daily bread* and four others...i wonder if anyone has ever tried to collect all those "things"....wearing a dead bat in one's armpit to have luck at cards...that in this other story, from finland...sisu.

some neat expressions like: *...when life and dreams were twin and everything one needed was possible by hard work.* i thought it was poetic and a nice touch, given the pig-faced brat fastened to the tit so-and-so pages previous.

from the 1st few pages: "love a place like kansas and you can be content in a garden of raked sand....this is a story of ordinary, hardworking, often out of work christians who are kansans until they die."

you have to pay attention because like other stories you see someone walking around and then thompson tells you the man is barefoot and you did not know.

....finished...19 nov 2011

this is the story of jack andersen, mostly, the story from birth to about age 14...in may....as he is left w/his mother's parents and they raise him to...must be almost ten when his mother gets him again and from there they...his mother, a step-father name of bill who is an occasional felon....they travel the south...leaving

wichita behind them...jacky returns to wichita at the end, determined to join the marines....

prior to that...he was determined to have sex w/his mother....there are numerous scenes throughout the story, jacky, feeling, touching, exploring his mother's body...she at times allowing it...most times, allowing it...the two of them often w/o bill the step-father...he is in jail often...the two of them in mississippi, in florida, in texas...trying to make a go, his mother wilma working as a prostitute...jacky at times stealing things...taught by bill at sears roebuck where he has jacky try on a leather jacket and walk out the door.

the time period is just prior to the outbreak of ww2...

this is a long and involved story...500+ pages...the characters are real...the circumstances are unfortunate...yet real...i was asking myself...what mother? what son?...my willing suspension of disbelief bought it, more or less, because he'd been raised from an early age to....about 9-10 by his grandparents...so his mother....shrug....it happened. in one town, a few want to do them in because a tenant in a neighboring room heard the boy asking/begging his mother to let him do her, like he did before...

some of the last chapters...the way they begin...curious, as a new character is often introduced...whereas prior, most of the story, followed the handful of main characters...some of the later chapters, the way they began...seemed...i dunno...i paused. not a bad thing...but i thought it was curious, i wondered how they came about...had a sense that the story could have just gone on and on and on....and these almost abrupt...in that they did not follow the earlier a-b-c-d-e-f narrative....as if these were...what? i dunno like i said, maybe the author trying to end this part of jacky's story?

as i understand it, the story continues w/tattoo...(jacky or someone like him in the service) and the devil to pay.

---

### **Art Lowell says**

I would have given this book five stars except for one thing. The accounts of incest bothered me intensely. Not because of the idiosyncrasy or the taboo quality of it, but because it was genuinely some of the sexiest writing I have ever read.

More of the same in Tattoo, as Jack grows up. No less foolish or selfish, but more adaptive.

---

### **Diane Barnes says**

I can't write a review of this one; instead I'll direct you to the review of Ned Mozier, who says it very well.

---

### **Laura says**

When you read a book with a cover protector on it because you want no questions asked by others, you know it's not a good read. It's one of the roughest books I have ever read in terms of subject matter and sexual content. You ask why I read the book, my answer, Donald Ray Pollock made me do it. A small group of reading friends found a list of reads that influenced Donald Ray Pollock. This book was on the list and the

last one for us to read. We don't give up easy. So to complete the task we finished this book. We ranged from 1 star to 3 stars collectively. I almost hate giving it 2 stars because that might give a reader hope that it is a readable and enjoyable book. I only give it 2 because early on there were some decent chapters. I can not recommend this to anyone and I don't know how to even get rid of the book without it being offensive to someone. It took me almost 4 months to read and it was a challenge.

---

### **Tina says**

This book is supposed to be autobiographical. If that is true then the author, while a talented writer, was one sick man and his family incestuous secrets needed to be kept secret and never put on paper. If you made it through the last 1/2 of *A Garden of Sand*, pat yourself on the back. It was one long, sad, sick journey.

*A Garden of Sand* was on a recommended reading list by Southern Grit author Donald Ray Pollack. Pollack said in an online publication that he read this book several times. Yuck. I felt violated and nauseated reading it once. I couldn't force myself to read it again. While there is some really good background on life in the Depression Era in this book, the grossly detailed mother and son relationship destroys any shred of humor, historic detail or creative writing within it. I look forward to burying my copy under a pile of clothes in a bag going to Goodwill soon. I'd throw it in the trash, but I'd feel guilty throwing away a book that is hard to find and barely in print anymore. I sure won't be loaning it to a friend for some light reading on their next vacation.

My rating: Proceed with caution. You can't read too much of this book in one sitting.

---

### **Szplug says**

Earl Thompson is a relatively unknown American writer, which is a shame, as he penned a handful of books before his untimely death that are as good as anything created by his peers. *A Garden of Sand* is one of my contender's for the *Great American Novel*, a semi-autobiographical story set in the desperate, illusion-shattering years of the Great Depression amongst those who lived their life close to the soil that had been the lifeblood of American prosperity. A boy is left with his grandparents in rural Kansas - an environ of stubborn independence and gritty, rumpled honour - until, reclaimed by his young mother, he learns an entirely *new* set of values as the two are dragged across the southern United States by the zigzagging peregrine ways of his rowdy stepfather. It could have been written by Steinbeck or Bellow, if they had worked on an oil-rig, or down in a mineshaft, drinking hard and fighting harder in blue-collar boozecans across the midwest; as good as those two American literary icons are, Thompson's prose feels *lived* in, *worked* in, batted around; leaves little doubt that the author had passed days as disheveled as those of his clenched-jaw characters.

Thompson's *bildungsroman* is a visceral stew, packed full of real, raw-boned Americans: angry and cheerful, stoic and wretched, broken, damaged, soulfully tender, crushed by that harshest of mistresses, life - yet scrappy and full of vibrant energy even in defeat. This is a tale with cantankerous elders and chin-skinned kids, grifters, drifters, cheats, and street saints, whores and pimps and roughnecks aplenty - fingernails are dirty, skin is bruised, and both sheets *and* souls are stained beyond redemption. The copious sex is raunchy and rough - and the young hero, Jack, deals with issues of abandonment by his gorgeous mother, and a yearning for her that is *way* beyond normal or healthy. The ending fits like a work glove as a closing off of the desperate measures, devil's bargains, and painful lessons that have pulled the reader along to the final

page—sad and worn and fractured, but limned with sun-burnished promise. Thompson would continue Jack's wayward journey through life in the equally excellent Tattoo.

---

### **Deborah Sheldon says**

Wow, this novel kicks down the door and raises hell! Brutal, violent, shocking, with superbly drawn characters and terrific dialogue. But be warned. Graphic scenes of beatings, rapes and incestuous liaisons make this a tough read at times. Definitely not for the fainthearted.

---

### **Renee says**

I read this book when I was 10. Not really age appropriate, but I would sneak and read my mom's books whenever I could. I couldn't remember who wrote it, only the title. This book has stayed with me my entire life. Jack was my age and many things hit close to home for me. After finding out about the author, I will have to reread this as an adult to see if it still affects me the same way.

---

### **Ned says**

Had I known what this was about, I never would have picked it up. But it lived up to recommendation as a serious work of fiction, and was an exceptional novel. However, I can't recommend it to many, it is disturbingly and frankly sexual in a way I've never encountered. These kind of people need religion and the strictures of civilization, and even as reader I feel the need to be cleansed. It is hardscrabble in the thirties, with drunken mean stepfathers and a whore / prostitute mother. Growing up Jack develops and consummates a seriously screwed up desire for his mother. And the encounters are absolutely relentless and told with cringing detail. But the story is real, and I will have to find out about this author and somehow begin to understand how any human being could get this down. I imagine this is autobiographical to some extent, all the more remarkable to put down this content, and he had to get it out (like Melville's Moby). But be forewarned, though entertaining, funny and educational about American history in the depression, this is very strong stuff and it will wear you out. It started in Kansas, so that's partly why I picked it up (my coming of age years were there), but most of it is throughout the hardscrabble gulf coast. Written in the 70s, this is a much more intense version of Angela's Ashes.

---

### **Ollie\_le\_clodo says**

This book is tough, violent, incestuous and makes you feel uncomfortable but vibrant in some way. I was appealed by the backcover saying it's in the same vein as Steinbeck and Fante. Well .. I have to admit it's true in a kind of way. A truly american dusty, filthy literature masterpiece. And thanks for the brilliant french edition (the translation is a gem) by Mr Toussaint l'ouverture.

---

## **Craig Kelly says**

Full of sex and description of depression era Kansas, this is a great book by a great author.

---