Rousseau's Elysium

Ermenonville Revisited

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In no fix'd place the happy souls reside. In groves we live, and lie on mossy beds, By crystal streams, that murmur thro' the meads: But pass yon easy hill, and thence descend; The path conducts you to your journey's end." This said, he led them up the mountain's brow, And shews them all the shining fields below. They wind the hill, and thro' the blissful meadows go.

— Virgil, *Aeneid* (6.641)

Introduction

The key to this book lies in the life and work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Rousseau's unorthodox ideas, thoughts and experiences have had an enormous influence on the social perspective of late 18th century French culture and the social debate preceding the French Revolution (1789).

My interest in Rousseau was inspired by a combination of admiration and passion, which symbolises the content and the message of this book and the accompanying photographs. A brilliant teacher of French language and literature, who joyfully and excitedly narrated the story of the French Enlightenment and its main events, first awakened my emotions when I was young. He sketched with enthusiasm the impact of the publication of Rousseau's *Discourse on the Inequality of Man*, *The Social Contract*, as well as his opera, *The Village Soothsayer* — and led us on a virtual tour of the key locations in Rousseau's life: Paris, Annécy, Chambéry, Geneva. However, my youthful enthusiasm was quenched immediately and completely 25 years later, when visiting the village of Ermenonville to further study the Park. My car, parked between the Chateau of the Marquis de Girardin and the Parc Jean-Jacques Rousseau, was broken into,

Statue of Rousseau in the Village of Ermenonville.

and our entire luggage was taken. I felt heart-broken and it took me ten years to overcome the material and emotional damage to my research into Rousseau's life and work.

This album, *Rousseau's Elysium,* presents and represents the final story of Rousseau, who after his wandering life spent six weeks of almost delirious refuge at the Marquis de Girardin's Chateau on the grounds of Ermenonville.

Above all, I am grateful to the Board of the *Musée de Chaalis,* for welcoming the 300th anniversary of Rousseau's birth with a meeting in the *Jardin des roses* of this beautiful museum. Writing and compiling this book was for me a self-proclaimed task which started over 30 years ago. My work was made possible by various pilgrimages to the *Parc Jean-Jacques Rousseau* to study the shapes, colours, textures, sounds, and movements of the place where Rousseau spent his final days. Despite the obvious changes since Rousseau's days, the memorable character of the Park still remains. With this book I hope to convey the Park's character textually and visually, and to allow readers to enjoy *Rousseau's Elysium* as much as he did in the final weeks of his life.

The images and text of this book represent selections from the natural and sculptural of the beauty of this Park, mediating between the carefully selected contours. It reveals my personal choice, yet also reflects the entire mysticism of nature. Maybe my fictional and cognitive story can now be enjoyed by the readers, who as pilgrims to Rousseau's memory, might fancy themselves followers of Rousseauism for a while.

Chapter 1

Rousseau's Elysium

On 20 May 1778, feeling old, tired, chased and betrayed Jean-Jacques Rousseau entered a dream come true: Ermenonville. Here, in the gardens of Marquis René-Louis de Girardin, he found the intricate mixture of the hand of God and that of man. Together they had created surroundings that were not only pleasing to the eye and soothing to the soul, but which had overcome the extremes of both creators: a wild and often brutish world and the artificial scars made by humans. These gardens came as close to heaven as possible in this world.

Rousseau had come a long, long way to finally find what he had unknowingly made possible to create. He left home a very young man, matured rapidly in the arms of a much older woman; wandered endlessly through Switzerland and France – he must have walked thousands of miles – and had to hide from persecutors; he fought with his friends and dined with his foes; he was admired and persecuted by kings; he searched tranquillity yet longed for admiration; he embarrassed himself in public, and made himself a star; his books were banned, but money was paid for a glimpse of them; he was timid and silent as well as impertinent and sharp; he was a genius and a fool; he meant to be honest, but suffered from

A Winding Path in the Parc.

self-delusion; he wrote an influential book on educating the young, but had left all his children at an orphanage; he preferred melody over harmony; he was fond of women, but was rejected time and again; he earned fame as a writer, but spent his life with an illiterate housemaid; he died and was buried in Ermenonville, but left behind an empty tomb.

The man was a bundle of contradictions in every respect, yet it was precisely these dichtomies in his life that allowed him to investigate seemingly insurmountable opposites. Rousseau criticized intellectual and technical achievements, which, in his view placed man gradually in another position towards their world and their fellow humans. At the same time, he very much doubted whether such achievements could be considered as advancements, which he elaborated in his *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750). He tried to convince his fellow man that it could have been different. He yearned for an age in which man was not corrupted by his achievements, where the *cris de la passion* ruled together with the *cris de la nature*. These constituted, according to Rousseau, the only true sign systems, because they were unconventional. In his preferred type of human society emotion not ratio ruled. Primitivism, the sheer cherishing of humans in their 'original' state without art or science, was no religious dogma to Rousseau, however, it was a polemical and allegorical aspect of his philosophy. In fact, he was far from preaching a return to nature and the simplicity of primeval times.[1] In the polemics that followed the publication of his first *Discours,* he wrote to the natural

Rousseau's Favorite Portrait.

1 Cf. Ehrard 1969: 392.

historian, Bonnet: "But how do you know, Sir, that I would go to live in the woods if my health would allow me, instead of living among my fellow citizens, knowing as you do, how much I love them? Without saying anything of the sort in my article, you must have seen that there are strong reasons for not choosing this kind of existence." Rousseau was perfectly aware of the fact that a 'return to nature' had become impossible, and that the only way to guide the deprivation of man was through a *social contract*, and by using the most natural form of communication possible.

Nevertheless, Rousseau, primitive man and nature are usually mentioned in one breath. They seem to be an indivisible trio, in popular wisdom as well as in scientific narrative, having both positive as well as negative connotations which could be found in his own day as well in modern times. However, is this really so straightforward, or is there more than meets the eye?

Rousseau's World

Personal experience was very important to Rousseau and influenced his work profoundly, both scholarly and literary. Had he not been a lifelong copier of music, he would probably never have written his É*crits sur la musique*, or formulated a new method of musical notation (1742), or fought his battle with Rameau over whether melody surpasses harmony, or the other way around (which resulted in him being denied access to L'Opéra in Paris), or compiled his *Dictionnaire sur la musique*. Perhaps he would never even have composed his *Le devin du village* (1752), this 'evergreen' opera, performened 250 times in a mere

50 years, and later so brilliantly paraphrased, or perhaps even parodied, by the 12-year old Mozart in *Bastien und Bastienne* in 1768.

Rousseau was a man who wanted to truly experience his craft and his intellectual passions, though it is difficult to tell which faculty came first; they must have been reciprocal to say the least. Being a sensory man, he liked to submerge himself in his subject matter in order to feel and understand its essence. Even when dealing with highly abstract matters, he roamed about, racking his brain until he enjoyed his 'Eureka' moment, as when meditating about the ideal state of man, which had emerged well before culture, as he knew it. His lengthy walks must have influenced him quite significantly. Walking was the most usual way of getting about in the 18th century, despite the frequent use of coaches and boats. Rousseau must have walked thousands of miles. Even at high age, he must have been over 64, he effortlessly walked around the outskirts of Paris from Montmartre to Montlouis via Menilmontant and back - some 20 km! - while botanizing all the way. We must bear in mind, that the roads were not quite as good as they are today! Apparently he was in a good condition; he did not get exhausted, as he vividly remembers a few years later how he had met a little girl on his way, that he took on his arm, and gave a kiss before walking on. In his 9th promenade he recalled, how, suddenly realizing that he had actually abandoned her, he ran back to ask where her father was and give her a few sous to buy some "pains de Nanterre."[2]

Rousseau's Statue in the Village's Center.

2 A particular kind of cookie named after this French city.

Paris on Cassini's Map of France (c.1750).

Despite his "mileage," it took him quite some time before the land he roamed really made a lasting impression that can be traced back in his work. He seldom speaks of it in his *Confessions* many years later (which must have been based on his diaries), let alone he wrote about the vegetative robe covering the earth. *The Confessions* is a real ego document. Initially, there is not that much room for landscapes, plants and trees. Instead, he wrote about the women he met and who were important in his

life, about his misery at being misunderstood, about his friends and foes, his projects and of course about his beloved 'Maman,' his much older lover, Mme de Warens.

It is not until the very end of his *Confessions*, written in the late sixties of his century, that he pays attention on the landscape, particularly that of Île de Saint-Pierre, his refuge when he had to flee from Môtiers-Travers. He testifies to have been a keen observer of the scenery, and gives a vivid description of the variety of the landscapes on the island, which pleased him so much that he felt he could have lived there until his dying day.

Rousseau's fascination with the landscape is perhaps not clearly manifest in his *Confessions*, but it was there. For, while writing his *Confessions*[3], he was also working on *Julie, ou de la nouvelle Héloïse* (1760/1761), and here we find what the landscape had begun to mean for him, and perhaps even what it had to mean to the world. Rousseau's short stay in Vevey at Hotel La Clef[4] was crucial in the development of the concept of nature in his thinking. Before writing about his stay at Vevey[5], '*nature*' always meant 'character', the 'order of things,' 'the way it should be.' At this point, however, the meaning was profoundly changed under the influence of a '*brodeur*'[6]

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3 The first part of *Les Confessions* was printed in December 1768. Three copies were stolen and circulated through Paris, and people even paid to read them.

4 This 'rustique' hotel and restaurant still exists today, and serves 'perche façon Rousseau,' (perch, prepared as Rousseau liked it), keeping the tradition alive. Even the table at which he sat is still to be seen in the restaurant.

5 In *Les Confessions* 'nature' occurs some 60 times, but it never alludes to the environment, the landscape, plants and trees, except when he actually starts talking about Vevey as a venue for his Julie, Claire or Saint-Preux.

6 Embroiderer

from Paris. Rousseau refered to him as 'un arche-Parisien du bon Dieu' (an arch-Parisian of the good Lord), whose name he unfortunately had forgotten by the time he started writing his *Confessions*. Being a good Catholic in that period[7] – embracing this faith without mystery or scruples – he went to mass together with other Catholics in Assens some two miles from Lausanne every Sunday, although only when the weather was fine. One of his companions was the unknown '*brodeur*,' who always made sure that Rousseau was in his company so that he could tell him about the beauty of the land he loved so much. There was, however, another member of this company, not quite as nice as the brodeur, who, while smiling maliciously, more or less interrogated Rousseau about what would happen when the honour and the beauty of the countryside were not defended.

Each in their own way have had an immense influence on Rousseau, for much later '*nature*' in his work no longer referred to the concepts above, but to the land, the plants and trees, which Rousseau always used to refer to as '*paysage*'. We see this clearly in his *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, in which he describes what he used to call '*paysages*,' in much more detail. Rousseau now elaborated on the constituents of the landscape – the plants, trees, a small brook - thus forming nature in the new – his new - sense.

In his 4th *Promenade*, Rousseau recalled having spent a lovely night out of town, walking along a road following the river Rhône, or maybe it was the Saône, he could not recollect which one. He was impressed by the

7 His entire life Rousseau "shuttled" between Protestantism and Catholicism.

Pedestal Bearing the Inscription "à La Rêverie".

gardens, which lay somewhat higher on terraces on the other side of the road; and he admired the colour of the sky when the sun was setting; he was opening all his senses and his heart to enjoy all this, while at the same time feeling a little sorry for the fact that he was enjoying it alone. Finally, he spent the night curled up in a niche in one of the old walls surrounding the gardens, and fell asleep while a nightingale sang its nightly song just above his head. His awakening was just as sublime as his falling asleep; when he opened his eyes, he saw water, the foliage, and a magnificent landscape. Rousseau was very fond of water. Frequently he left his rowing boat at the mercy

of wind and water and surrendered to *Rêveries* without a subject, and while perhaps being rather silly, as he admitted, they were sweet nonetheless. Sometimes he cried out emotionally: 'Oh nature, oh my mother, here I am under your only guard…'. and became so delirious that he felt he was hovering half a mile above the world. But he soon returned back to earth, thinking of his dog that always accompanied him and hated being left alone on the shore for two hours. Normally Rousseau chose a goal for his boat trips; he rowed to a small island, sat down in the grass to examine and determine the plants and flowers around him and feeling like a Robinson Crusoe he imagined himself building a dwelling on the island. Gradually, he became very much attached to this little island.

In *"Julie"* Rousseau asked his readers to imagine the impressions, which he described in order to get some idea in which delicious state he was. "Try to imagine the variety," he said, "the grandeur and the beauty of a thousand stunning views; the pleasure to be surrounded by nothing but new phenomena, rare birds, bizarre and unknown plants, observing in a sense another type of nature, to find oneself in a new world." His experience of this nature was like magic, something that moved the spirit and the senses. It made one forget everything, one's self, and even the place where one was. The trees, the bushes, the plants are the decoration and the attire of the earth. Nothing is as sad as a naked countryside, which unfolds itself before your eyes as rocks, silt and sand, he wrote. But enlivened by nature and redressed in its bridal gown surrounded by streaming brooks and the singing of birds, the earth offers man a theatre full of life, significance and charm, which will never leave him, he explains in his 7th *Promenade*.

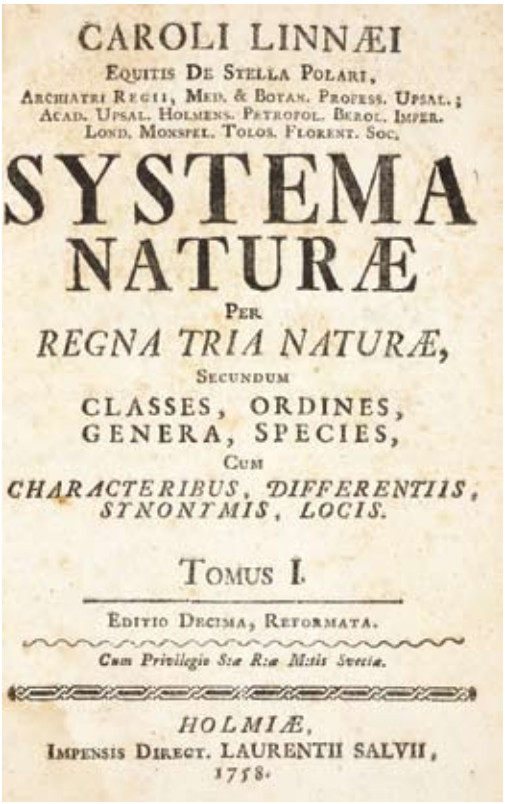
Chapter 2

Plants and Landscapes

In the 4th *Promenade* in his *Rêveries*, writing about the period he resided on the *Île de Saint Pierre*, Rousseau describes how he was tired of all the paperwork in his room and decided to fill it with flowers and hay instead, inspired as he was by his beloved pastime botany. He got his inspiration at the time from Docteur Jean-Antoine d'Ivernois, author of *Catalogue méthodique des plantes*.

Despite it being a refuge, he adored the island, as he explained in the 12th Book of his *Confessions*, and during his stay he even thought of compiling a *Flora petrinsularis* in which he would describe all the plants on the Île de Saint-Pierre, stressing he would not forget a single one. Actually, he undertook his mission quite scientifically. He divided a canton of the island into squares with the intention of researching these during every single season. So, there he went, sporting a magnifying glass and Linné's *Systema naturae* (1735). Each new observation made him exited about the structure and the vegetative organization: the sexual parts of the flowers, on which Linné had based his classification system, which was completely new to Rousseau.

Landscape Bordering Ermenonville.



CAROLI LINNÆI

EQUITIS DE STELLA POLARI,

ARCHIATRI REGII, MED. & BOTAN. PROFESS. UPSAL.;
ACAD. UPSAL. HOLMENS. PETROPOL. BEROL. IMPER.
LOND. MONSPEL. TOLOS. FLORENT. SOC.

SYSTEMA NATURÆ

PER

REGNA TRIA NATURÆ,

SECUNDUM

CLASSES, ORDINES,
GENERA, SPECIES,

CUM

CHARACTERIBUS, DIFFERENTIIS,
SYNONYMIS, LOCIS.

TOMUS I.

EDITIO DECIMA, REFORMATA.

Cum Privilegio S.æ R.æ M.tis Sveciæ.

HOLMIÆ,
IMPENSIS DIRECT. LAURENTII SALVII,
1758.

Systema Naturae. Originally Published in 1735.

However, despite his love for botany, in the end he was convinced he had to give up this noble study due to lack of physique; he just felt too weak to make long walks in the fields to botanize, although he continued to collect plants and flowers on all his travels. By now he was 60 years old, living in Paris; his amusement was no longer necessary, he said. He had to copy music instead to earn a living. He even took to selling his books and his herbals, being content with the few plants he collected on his walks just outside the city.

Years later, when he was 65 years old, deprived of what was left of his memory, or so he said, he took up his old folly again. Much to his surprise, as it seems. He started to learn Murray's botanical works by heart to get to know all the plants covering the earth. Due to a lack of money, he borrowed all the books he needed and even began copying them. He was sure he would make a far better herbarium than ever before. He wanted to include exotic plants, and botanized intensively around the cages of

Page from an Original Herbal by Rousseau.

his birds which were fed all kinds of unknown seeds, and with every new species, he would say to himself: '*Voilà, encore une plante de plus.*'[8] He was convinced that he was doing the right thing, considering his circumstances. It would prevent him from letting hatred into his heart and at the same time he saw it as revenge against his former prosecutors. He would not know a crueler way of punishment than being happy despite them.

Rousseau's herbals acted as his *aide mémoire*; he recollected his every thought, impression and idea when he leafed through his herbals again. In his mind he would see the beautiful landscapes, the woods, the lakes, the bushes, the rocks and the mountains, which all touched his heart. In fact, he deliberately picked the flowers, knowing that they constituted signs, which he did not need to interpret. Fortunately, through his herbals he could relive these moments time and again. He almost sounds surprised when he realized that even small fragments of the plants he collected and dried were capable of doing so. However, he did comprehend that these memories attached him to botany, and realized that his recollections were flattered. Botany brought him back to peaceful dwellings amidst gentile people with whom he had lived before. It reminded him of his youth and his innocent pleasures; they made him either happy or as sad as can be. Rousseau turned to the plants in order to be able to turn to his herbariums thus forming a source of immediate memory.[9] The plants acted as private symbols, whose meaning was clear only to him, without any

8 'Look, yet another plant.'
9 According to Starobinski, 1971:281

Monumental Tree in the Park.

interpretation, thus constituting a form of nonverbal communication – the type he preferred; they acted as his own *cris de la nature* and *cris de la passion.* He felt the same when telling about his journeys, as he felt when he was making his herbals, and when leafing through them; he relived both his traveling and his botanizing again. His heart beat heavily when he remembered his Maman, and at such moments, he did not walk too fast, not wanting to spoil the sensation. Sauntering through woods and fields, thoughtlessly picking a flower or twig, biting a leave of grass, seeing the same things a thousand times, but each time with fresh interest as he had already forgotten his previous experience; this was the perfect way to spend eternity without being bored for one single moment, he pondered in the 12th Book of his Confessions. After all, so he discusses with his alter ego, botany was a virtuous study for sensitive souls, and especially for lonesome people. In this dialogue, *Rousseau judge de Jean-Jacques*, he emphasized the great amount of time he spent on botany, the thousands of plants he had collected, identified, meticulously dried and glued into his herbariums. The image as an *aide mémoire* returns in *Julie*, in which Saint-Preux is almost more passionate when receiving a picture of his beloved Julie than when he saw her in the flesh; the lifeless representation was enough to evoke real passion, which also happened to Rousseau and his herbariums. Years later, in the 3rd *Promenade,* Rousseau dwelt briefly on his meditation and study of nature, a contemplation of the universe that forces a '*solitaire*' to turn to the creator of it all and wonder about everything he saw or felt. Yet, Rousseau no

longer wanted to teach himself as he considered himself too old. Furthermore, he had never really seen science contribute to a happier life, as he tried to show in his *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*. He wanted to give himself over to simple pleasures, which he could enjoy without any troubles, and which distracted from his sadness. He never took the trouble to pick one plant after another to examine them and compare their various characteristics, to see their similarities or differences; in short, to study the vegetative organization. He rather indulged in admiration, grateful to the hand which made all this. Botany was, as he wrote to his pupil Madelon, Madame Deslessert's daughter, in his *Lettres élémentaire sur la botanique*, 'a study of pure curiosity.' Madame Deslessert received a herbarium, just as some of his dear friends. They were pocketsize in order to take them along on their botanical trips. To Rousseau herbariums not only had a memorative significance, but he also considered them as an invaluable source of data, especially for newcomers in this field, for they could facilitate recognition and identification of plants in the field.

His love for botany had started when staying with his *Maman*, whose herbalist was her servant Claude Anet, who gained his experience when collecting herbs for Swiss tea in the Jura Mountains. Despite Rousseau's later cynicism about the medicinal applications of herbs, Mme de Warens used the plants particularly for making teas[10] and medicines. Even then Rousseau thought he could become a great botanist, as his love for botany coincided perfectly with his love of his surroundings.

10 In French herbal tea is called 'tisane' or 'infusion'.

Yet, what he learned from Anet and Maman filled him with unease, as botany now seemed more suitable for an apothecary. At that time the studies of botany, chemistry and anatomy had all been united under the name 'medicine,' and even then he ridiculed the search for herbal remedies. Many years later, he wrote: "I would like to think that man's talents are like the virtues of medicinal plants, given by nature to heal our ailments, while its intention is that we do not need them. There are plants that poison us, animals that devour us, and talents that are pernicious. Whether to always use everything according to its main properties would perhaps do less good than harm to men." According to his friend Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Rousseau once said to Thérèse: "When you find me gravely ill, without any hope of recovering, put me in a meadow and the mere sight of it will cure me." He considered himself the living proof of the idleness and useless cares of medicine, and in *Émile* he even warned against its use on children unless their lives were in immediate danger. His complaint about botany in general was that right from its inception, because it been a part of medicine, one had forgotten all about the plants themselves. In this way many plants had changed into universal panaceas only to immortalize the human species, Rousseau said. Medical ideas were hardly suited to making the study of plants more pleasant. It "would bleach the glitter in the meadows, dry the freshness of the bushes, and dim their shadows and greens. All these charming structures would not interest anyone who wants to grind everything in a mortar," Rousseau wrote in his 7th Promenade.

The Main Lake where Rousseau Used to Row.

Around 1762, many years after he had learned to botanize from Anet at Mme de Warens', and ten years before he wrote his first *Lettres élémentaires sur la botanique,* he met Jean-Antoine d'Ivernois. This physician from Neuchatel was the author of a book on the wild plants found near his hometown and awakened Rousseau's real passion for botany. He kindly acknowledged d'Ivernois

in his *Rêveries* as the one who inspired him to take up botany. However, many years earlier in his *Confessions* he wrote quite extensively about d'Ivernois, describing him as a nosy man who had no interest in botany at all, although he accompanied Rousseau on many of his botanizing tours. He detested the man and got annoyed by him, wanted to be rid of him; they had nothing to say to each other.

His definite choice for botany was explained much later, and rather ironically, also in his *Rêveries*. Here he claimed that mineralogy did not appeal to him, as all the riches appeared to be hidden in the bowels of the earth precisely to avoid man's attention and curiosity. Students of minerals almost had to bury themselves alive to pursue research. Filling one's pockets and cabinets with stones while pretending to be a naturalist was only for ignoramuses and people who liked to show off, he said. Studying animals was also out of the question; they were too quick or too shy, they were in the sky, or under water. "I could not spend my life running myself breathless chasing butterflies," he declared in his 7th *Promenade*.

Because of the many years Rousseau had been studying botany he believed he had acquired a considerable knowledge of plants, especially on his journeys. "During the long and frequent botanising expeditions, he has made an immense collection of plants," so Rousseau declared of Jean-Jacques. His passion for botany grew and became increasingly scientific. In a letter dated 26 April 1770 to Marc-Antoine de Fleurieu de la Tourette (1729-1776), author of *Démonstrations élémentaires de*

botanique à l'usage de l'école royale vétérinaire,[11] Rousseau wrote: "I admit that the difficulties I met in the study of plants gave me some idea about the way to modify it and to make it more useful to others who follow the thread through the realm of plants, by means of a method which is more gradual and less abstract than that of Tournefort and his followers, without excluding Linné."[12] Their correspondence had started when Fleurieu de la Tourette had encouraged Rousseau to compile a botanical dictionary, which should promote a critical attitude towards botany, its aims and its students.

Obviously, Rousseau's emotional bond with botany influenced his scientific attitude. Conversely, his aesthetic and emotional needs were fulfilled only when they coincided with the scientific aspects of botany: "I look at plants, observe them, compare them, and eventually learn to classify them; suddenly I am just as much a botanist as is needed for someone who wants to study nature to love her even more," he wrote in his 7th *Promenade*. Yet, however elegant, lovely and various plants may be, he admitted, they do not strike the eye of the ignorant enough to fascinate. The constant analogy and still rich variety characterizing their organization are conveyed only to those who already have an idea of the taxonomy of plants. All the others have, and this is true for all treasures of nature, an idiotic and monotonous admiration, he concluded.

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11 *Elementary Botanical Demonstrations Used at the Royal Veterinary School.*

12 in Haudricourt 1983, my translation.

Carolus Linnaeus by Hendrik Hollander (1853).

This was intended as a defence or endorsement rather of Linné's *Systema naturae* (1735), which had not been received well by French natural historians like Bonnet [a fellow citizen of Rousseau, (1720-1793)], Jussieu[13] and Buffon (1707-1978). Rousseau, however, used Linné's

13 Jussieu, member of a virtual dynasty of botanists in the 17th and 18th century.

work to criticize his fellow botanists, and he did not hide his admiration for the Swedish master: "Alone with nature and with you, I spend happy hours in the countryside, and from your *Philosophia botanica* (1751) I get more real profit than from all other books on ethics. I read your works, study them and reflect on them; and I revere you and love you with all my heart," he wrote in a letter to Linné on 21 September 1771. Rousseau was not only enthusiastic because of the systematic way in which Linné treated the world of plants, but also because he provided his readers with lots of practical information, which were scattered through the text: How to press and mount plants to make a herbarium; what a botanical novice should know and what clothes one should wear on botanical excursions. Besides teaching botany to the reader, it had the character of a guide for the outdoors. Linné also paid attention to which plants could be found in particular habitats, what seems like one of the earliest descriptions of ecological communities. According to Rousseau, this naturalist was the only one to regard botany both as a study of nature and a branch of philosophy, despite the fact that Linné had done too much research in gardens instead of in nature. Rousseau worried continuously about this delightful study, so prone to denaturalization. It did not belong in towns or academies, as it would denaturalize just as fast as the exotic plants in our gardens. Rousseau complained about man adapting so many things to his own use, and, while he could hardly blame people for doing so, he could not escape the impression that in adapting plants man had always disfigured them. He illustrated this with fruit trees,

profoundly denaturalized by grafting to have the orchard produce the best apples and pears. Still they only procure wild offspring, he remarked triumphantly! "Therefore, if you really want to look for wild apples, you must go to the forest. These apples are not as big and juicy, but the seeds ripen much better and their saplings are larger and more vigorous," he claimed.

The analogy in the difference between cultivated and wild fruit and between civilized man and the '*sauvage*' is striking. Was it not when leaving the forest, just like the wild fruit, that the sturdy savage (literally: 'from the forest') became the weak civilized citizen? Grafting was an act of cultivation just as civilizing was to man, for in both cases a wild species was tamed.

Rousseau's example also shows us that he saw evidence in the fruit trees that the state of 'primitive man,' in the sense of 'original' man, could perhaps still be achieved; were the cultivated fruit trees not generating wild and natural offspring without man's interference, he remarked. Following this analogy, Rousseau felt that in order to communicate with nature, we had to re-establish our relationship with nature. That is why he preferred studying wild plants in the countryside, instead of cultivated plants in gardens. He mocked Louis XV's physician, who could not identify a single medicinal plant in the wild, but knew all the plants in the *Jardin royale*. In fact, his entire criticism of French society was evoked by his love of nature, as he defined it later in life.

Despite being attached to the works of Linné and his method of classifying plants, Rousseau considered it aberrant to only discuss methods of classifications, as it did

not help discover one single new plant species.[14] And, indeed, a great number of classification systems vied with each other in Rousseau's days. Moreover, he found the use of Latin and Greek rather exaggerated: "One need not be a scholar in grammar before one is able to know plants, of which the vocabulary is so pedantically compiled in these two languages." He did praise, however, Linné's efficient terminology: "The words are short, expressive, sober and even form elegant constructions because of their extreme precision," he wrote in his botanical dictionary. In his letters to four-year-old Madelon he warned her not to spend too much time on nomenclature. Only 'herboristic' knowledge as he himself taught could make a great botanist without knowing a single name. This attitude coincided, of course, perfectly with his dialectical attitude towards science. He wanted to be a free man - calling himself a *botaniste sans maitre* – and wanted to absorb as much as needed to satisfy his hunger for knowledge. He wanted to devote himself to this study out of pure curiosity and because he longed to talk to nature and to himself. Still, he acquired a large number of precious botanical works by great botanists and when he went to England to stay with David Hume. He was given various valuable botanical works by the Duchess of Portland – to whom he gave one of his most elaborate herbariums in which some hundred species were grouped together on the basis of Linnaeus' classification system - such as *The Herbal or General History of Plants*, by John Gerarde from 1597. Back in Paris he bought more botanical books; two works by the brothers Jean

David Hume.

14 Effective classification may in fact help discover new species.

and Caspar Bauhin respectively, whom he very much admired, and credited for compiling the first systematic works in botany. He studied these works very carefully, which eventually led to his *Brouillons sur la botanique*, which contains excellent excerpts of Bauhin's methods and descriptions.

Here, of course, we see Rousseau's ambiguous attitude towards science: while claiming time and again that science did not contribute to the quality of human existence, he tried to get hold of as many scientific works he could. He even had, like Linné, his own correspondents in Neuchâtel, Geneva, Grenoble, Nimes, Montpellier, Dijon, Amsterdam and London, who sent him specimens to enlarge both his collection and knowledge of plants, which was quite an enterprise for someone who said that he only wanted to know more of this realm of nature to be able to love it even more. His botanical endeavours deserve to be taken seriously, as they did much to make botany one of the most popular of sciences in his era.

Botany led him to love nature as a whole. This love was far more lucid than the rather superficial premises of most of his contemporaries, who turned to the countryside the second half of the 18th century. To Rousseau the quest for nature was not merely induced by the need for wellbeing, though much of his botanical endeavours seemed no more than leisure time activity; recreational, at least, but it always acted as a source of inspiration. Moreover, he was not just seeking immediate fulfilment when botanizing and walking the forests and fields, he sought nothing less than earthly bliss, possibly enriched

by the celestial experience. A kind of geodicee[15] emerged, in which the world got its justification by admiration – just as Linné was indirectly honouring God by unravelling the intricately woven significance in the world of plants and animals. The love and understanding of the world of plants and animals went hand in glove with Rousseau, and he used Linné's ideas to better understand in order to love this world even more. The journal *L'Année littéraire*[16] depicted Rousseau with a handful of grains, accompanied by a text saying that this was not a laughing matter, but that in his hand he held the very proof of God's existence. Rousseau himself had made a comparable statement in his *Fragments pour un dictionnaire pour usage en botanique* when he said that "… it was in the research of this brilliant phenomenon, and in the display of this riches that the botanist admired with ecstasy the divine art and the exquisite taste of the Creator who made the robe of our mother earth."

Rousseau's love of botany was contagious, and it became the most popular science at the time, attracting flocks of amateur followers. Most French natural historians were still against Linné's classification system, but once adapted it could reach most amateur botanists through Rousseau. In 1774 Louis XV ordered that the Swedish system was to be adopted, which must have come as a severe blow to Buffon[17], head of the Kings Garden, who was an ardent opponent of Linné.

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15 Geodicee, comparable to theodicee, wherein theos (God) is replaced by geo (earth).

16 Journal founded in Paris in 1754 by Elie Fréron

17 Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1707-1788), naturalist, mathematician, biologist, cosmologist and writer.

This newfound love of botany in particular and nature in general, brought with it the rediscovery of rural life, which made people aware of the artificiality of city life. They realized that they were living too luxuriously; closeness to nature necessitated a much more sober life. Eventually, the idea that sobriety could contribute to a healthy life became popular, though nature disapproved of real ascesis. The concept of frugality was developed, which implied the possibility of choosing from all the pleasures culture provided, and those offered by uncomplicated nature. Frugality evoked nostalgic memories of yesteryear in which no unhealthy temptation interfered with the pure pleasure and joy of mankind at the moment they left the hands of the creator.[18]

In France, a triadic relationship emerged between nature, happiness and frugality, which opposed the extravagance of the rich, nobility and merchants. Surprisingly, it was exactly these groups who became fervent adherents of frugality. They tried to be moderate, avoided copious meals and excessive luxury in housing and clothing. Frugality spread through all social classes, though each class tried to be moderate in its own way, thus preventing an egalitarian society. Whereas French society was definitely not egalitarian, and the vast gap between the social classes would eventually lead to the Revolution of 1789, still, the patriciate and the nobility were intellectually sensitive to new challenges, and both social strata were sustaining commoners, as long they were fascinating and intriguing. Rousseau fitted into this category. He was, for instance, a life-long friend and protégé of

18 cf. Ehrard p. 317-318

Montmorency-Luxembourg.

Maréchal de Luxembourg,[19] who even offered him shelter twice between 1757 and 1762 in his chateaux in Saint-Louis and Montmorency, and appears frequently in *Les Confessions*.[20] We see that Rousseau's social relationships were significantly influenced by his friendship with the Luxembourgs. He had many benefactors among the nobility of his day and because he had to flee from persecution time and again, he was frequently offered a tranquil place to stay. The one in Ermenonville was to become his last.

19 Charles François de Montmerency-Luxembourg (1702-1764, French marshal in 1757, direct descendant of Hugues Capet (King of France 987-996). He was married to Élizabeth S.F. Lalive de Bellegarde, comtesse d'Houdetot (1730-1813) sister-in- law of Louise d'Epinay (1726-1783), with both of whom Rousseau had rather difficult amorous liaisons.

20 Which stops with the 12th Book in 1762, some 26 years before Rousseau died.

Chapter 3

De Girardin's *paysages interessans*

He was grateful he could come and stay with someone who really seemed to understand him. "Oh, Sir, it has been so long that my heart wanted to come, and now my eyes make me wish to stay here all my life." Rousseau's arrival in Ermenonville made a lasting impression among all the characters in this staged '*pastorale*,' with Rousseau jumping out of the carriage and hugging the trees alongside the driveway; his cries for joy, while shedding tears of pure happiness, when he made acquaintance with De Girardin's wife and children. Marquis Louis-René de Girardin had realised Rousseau's dream when he laid out the gardens around his chateau based on his own concepts and those of Rousseau. Was it pride of his accomplishments; was it commiseration with the famous and tormented writer and philosopher that made him invite Rousseau? We will never know. What we do know is that here Rousseau found his own ideas made tangible, six weeks of happiness, and his unfortunate and untimely death.

Marquis Louis-René de Girardin (1735-1808) belonged to one of the richest families of 18th-century France. He was a former military man who fought in the Seven Years War. He was married to Cécile Brigitte

Old Trees Overlooking the Lake.

Adélaide Berthelot, descendant of the ancient House of Lorraine. He grew up in an era in which the so-called 'physiocratic' movement ruled, which saw agriculture as the only source of wealth and prosperity.[21] While in England in the same period profound changes were occurring in agricultural methods and techniques, France stuck to the traditional approach. Although not averse to the future, the Marquis was an admirer of the Golden Age. The myth of the Golden Age was firmly embedded in pastoral literature and frequently entire landscapes were learned by heart. Of course, the pastoral idyll, or arcadia[22] was nothing but mental recreation. Still, it was significant in shaping the physical world. In the 18th century, the purely geographical world view, dominated by Cartesian laws, disappeared. Moreover, after a century of polemics about straight lines and symmetry, the liberty of form took over landscaping.[23]

During this period De Girardin was living at the court of the King of Poland, Stanislaw Leszcynski in Lunéville who had close ties with the Berthelot family. Not only was De Girardin's first son Stanislas named after the King, but the King was also his Godfather. Like many enlightened royals, Leszcynski was a fervent adherent and Maecenas of the arts and sciences and was particularly hospitable to various '*philosophes*.' [24]

Stanislaw Leszcynski (1677-1766).

21 cf. Rahel, 2008
22 cf. Schama, 1995
23 cf.Rahal, 2008
24 Montesquieu also was the guest of King Stanislaw, in the summer of 1747. He finished his *L'esprit des lois* (1748) in Lunéville (South-East of Nancy).

Rene-Louis de Girardin in Walking Outfit.

King Stanislaw's castle and gardens were, of course, of a traditional French character, but could not capture De Girardin's heart. The gardens were symmetrical and speckled with Chinese pagodas and small monuments. De Girardin was an intelligent and studious man. Like many of his contemporaries he planned a grand tour together with his son Stanislas, and almost by default they went to Italy first. Had the *Académie française* not instituted the Prix de Rome (1663) to enable young French students to enhance their talents?

Besides Italy, De Girardin visited England, Germany and Switzerland paying special attention to agriculture and prosperity. His stay in England was not only much longer, but also influenced him even more profoundly than any other journey. Like many French intellectuals he was impressed by the English gardens. The English were fond of medieval and gothic ruins, blend in tastefully with their surroundings, sung by poets and put on canvas by painters. Gardens in England were clearly a means of expression for the bourgeoisie.

Landscaping already was De Girardin's passion, and when he inherited the castle in Ermenonville from his maternal grandfather, René Hatte, in 1762 - the castle and its grounds were obviously in the classicist style, not unlike Versailles - he decided to restore the entire place and took up residence with his family in 1766. A lot of work had to be done first, and reading Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse,* published in 1762 had only been a first step. As De Girardin took landscaping and agriculture very seriously, he wrote, on the basis of all his studies abroad, especially those in England, *De la composition*

Chateau of the Marquis de Girardin.

des paysages, ou des moyens d'embellir la nature autour des habitations, en y joignant l'agréable à l'utile[25], which was published in 1777.

De Girardin was a man of his time; moreover, he was wealthy, well-educated and of noble descent; all ingredients for being a dilettante like many of his peers in

25 *Essay on the Means to Improve and Embellish Nature around our habitations, combining the pleasant with the useful*

pre-revolutionary France. Just like other intellectuals, he took his mission seriously. He studied painting, literature and poetry and was inspired by all three, saying: "It takes painters and poets to compose landscapes," which he later would prove to take literally.

He was inspired by the painter 'le Lorrain' (Claude Gellée, c.1600-1682), and allegedly Ruisdael[26] (c.1628-1682), for the Southern and Northern part of the *Parc* respectively, with the castle situated right in the middle. The northern part of the *Parc* clearly looks much more formal than the Southern part, which really has the character of an English garden. Most painters at the time fabricated dramatized landscapes, made up of landmarks, villages, castles, ruins, mills and monumental trees. Either nature was the origin of the painting, or the painting was the prime origin of the landscape. In England, the painting more or less preceded the landscape, whereas De Girardin tried to lay out a landscape that invited to be painted.[27] As he saw painters and poets as the right professionals to embark on his journey to '*paysages interessans*,' he surrounded himself with the most promising and talented poets and painters 18th century France had to offer.

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26 It is doubtful, to say the least, whether Girardin ever saw a Ruysdael, as Rahal (2008) claims, for it is not known whether he ever visited Holland. It is more likely that he had seen works by Gainsborough in the British Museum that he supposedly visited.

27 Since Classic times, paintings, drawings and even descriptions of nature influenced the frequently fictitious rendition of natural history, thus leading to sightings of mermaids, for instance (Van den Broek 2010).

It is obvious that De Girardin learned a lot from Italian landscapers, borrowing, for instance, their lightness of style. On his journeys to Switzerland and Italy he was accompanied by his son Stanislas (1762-1828), who was still very young, especially considering that a large part of the journey was done on foot. The valet Theodore, famous for his ugly features and his command of several languages, accompanied them. Last member of their group was Claude-Louis Châtelet (1753-1795), who was Stanislas' teacher and later gained an excellent reputation as a painter because of his contributions to various important and famous topographical works of Switzerland, Naples and Sicily.

Châtelet travelled to Italy quite frequently, where he met with various important figures who helped build his reputation. Upon his return to France, he became Marie-Antoinette' s favourite painter who granted him several assignments. He contributed to a three-volume book about the Trianon gardens and illustrated an edition of Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*. Alas, he sympathized with the ideas of the revolution and even became a member of the *Tribunale révolutionnaire*. He was arrested after the fall of Robespierre (May 1794) and was decapitated in May 1795.

In 1777 De Girardin welcomed yet another painter to Ermenonville to assist him in designing the gardens: G. Fr. Meyer, who also acted as a teacher for his son Stanislas, who, like everyone else who knew him, grew very fond of this nice and pleasant man. The multi-talented Meyer was responsible for renovating an adjoining island, a garden in ruins and the grand cascade. He was

Tombstone of G.F. Meyer 1735-1779.

View from the More Formal Part of the Park at the North Side of the Chateau.

not a member of the Academy, nor did he seem to have had any ambition of joining. When in 1779 he finally decided to start his '*tableau de reception*' for the Academy, he died. He had been a guest of the De Girardin family for eighteen months and he was buried on the grounds not far from Île des peupliers.

Auguste Gandat (1758-1794), another painter/landscaper, also became one of Stanislas' teachers. He, too, was a grand 'paysagiste,' and like Meyer died at Ermenonville. De Girardin surrounded himself with experts, and also received professional aid from J.M. Morel, nicknamed the Kent of France. After he finished the

The Tempel of Philosophy Overlooking the Main Lake.

project in Ermenonville Morel published *Théorie des jardins* in 1776 (only a year before De Girardin published his own work), for which Rousseau allegedly wrote the preface. Morel gives an elaborated description of the garden of Ermenonville, before, as he put it, "*il fut confie a mes soins*" (it was committed to my care). And he applied his theories to the gardens of Ermenonville. Under his supervision, so it seems, a well-balanced – nature vis à

vis deliberate lay-out - garden emerged, something he describes with much detail, posing and solving theoretical problems at the same time. He realized, for instance, that as with all *arts de gout* (arts of taste), there are two distinct parties: the liberal and the mechanic, in other words, the one who depends on taste and the one who is dependent on manual labour. Sometimes they are united in one and the same person, like the painter or the sculptor. Others need the assistance of *'des mains étrangères'* (other one's hands) for the execution of the work, like the architect and the music composer. Morel lamented the difficulties the gardener meets in his work, which are far greater than any other artist's.

De Girardin also managed to commission Jean-Marie Moch, the almost obscure young genius, who already at 17 taught geometry at the *École nationale des ponts et chaussées,* the oldest and most prestigious school of engineering in the world, (Paris, 1747 – present).

Despite De Girardin's early and vivid interest in any other than the traditional French type of landscaping, the gardens in Ermenonville were not the first *jardins à l'Anglaise* in France before the outbreak of the Revolution. Jardin de Marboeuf, planted by Chevalier Jansen, an Englishman; the gardens of Beloeil, the chateau of the Prince de Ligne; Montreuil, a garden of the Princess Grémène; and Maupertius, a garden of the Marquis de Montesquieu, to mention the most important ones.

On the other hand, it remains to be seen, whether De Girardin really wanted to construct an English *garden*. His prime interest was the landscape. He wanted to realize *paysages interessans*, as he wrote in his *De la*

A View at the Île des peupliers, with the Chateau in the Background.

composition… not gardens *per se*. He stressed that he did not study the ancient garden, or the English garden, nor the Chinese, or 'Cochinchinese' garden, or the differences between gardens, parks, farms or terrains. He just wished to show the endless possibilities of embellishing and enriching nature. De Girardin intended constructing an appealing landscape where the viewer would find what he was searching; for that must be the effect of '*paysages interessans*.'

This perspective was very much like that of Rousseau when describing Switzerland, in which nature, agriculture, houses, and roads formed a park-like scenery. The title of his book says it all, one might say. The grounds of Ermenonville had to be reconstructed to create an interesting landscape, in which all the necessary ingredients fitted well together to form a pleasing, varied countryside that was both beautiful and prosperous.

To this end he wanted to get rid of straight lines. He mentioned Le Notre (1613-1700), who for 45 years was Louis XIV's famous landscape architect and gardener. He massacred nature by drawing mathematical lines through the landscape with the help of a compass. And the trees were lined up along the lines of this wretched symmetry, De Girardin wrote. Therefore not the architect, or the gardener should create the landscape, but the poet and the painter so that it would appeal to both the eye and the mind, according to De Girardin. The picturesque and beautiful share the same principle, as one is the original and the other is the copy. Everything must come together. Every discordance in perspective or in the harmony of colors, is as unacceptable in the painting of the landscape as it is in the painting on the canvas.

But if the picturesque enchants the eyes, and the poetic scenery moves the spirit and the mind, recapturing Arcadian scenes; if a painter and a poet can create a composition, then nature has more to offer. In De Girardin's view this was the Romantic style, which combined all the beautiful effects of the picturesque perspective and the softness of the poetical scenery. Without being wild or savage, the romantic garden should be tranquil and

solitary, according to De Girardin. He was the first who used the word *romantique* in France, something he picked up in England. Before he introduced it, the word 'Romanesque' was sometimes used in this sense, in France. Wrongly, De Girardin held, as it stands for 'la fable du Roman,' whereas *romantique* signifies a touching or moving situation. Rousseau, however, still used 'romanesque' where he meant 'romantique,' in his *Confessions*.

De Girardin's *De la composition…* is not only a theoretical work, but also a guide to all who want to lay out their own pleasing landscape. He advised his readers who have such plans, to first acquaint themselves with their terrain, and to make a tableau, or have one made. He tried to convince his readers that this is done ideally by a real painter of landscapes! At the same time he advised them to make their own sketches - like he did too, when working on the design of the grounds of his chateau in Ermenonville. However, in his memoirs his son Stanislas admitted that his father was not a very talented sketcher, which matched his lack of talent for music, although De Girardin was very fond of making and listening to music.

Of course, like so many others, De Girardin had read *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, which revealed the strong passion shared by both men: landscape and nature. In 1778 he invited the tormented Rousseau and Thérèse to stay at his estate in Ermenonville, a dream come true. Since its publication, De Girardin had been under the spell of *Julie* and he transformed his grandfather's baroque gardens into Julie's Elysium. De Girardin must

have thought that a stay in Ermenonville would offer some consolation to Rousseau, whose health seemed to be deteriorating and his end close by, about which De Girardin proved at least partially wrong.

Rousseau and De Girardin had met before, when on his return from Italy the latter was introduced to Rousseau. He had some Italian music copied by Rousseau (which was the only means for strangers to approach him). Stanislas later admired the copies for their clean and faultless presentation. Stanislas always went along with his father who went to see Rousseau at least twice a week when Rousseau was living in the rue Platrière in Paris. Young Stanislas grew fond of the man with the raspy voice, who still sang so passionately. He accompanied Rousseau on his rusty old *épinette* (spinet). Rousseau in turn tried in vain to convince the boy of the quality of the newly composed variations of his well-known opera, *Le Devin de village* (*The Village Soothsayer*).

One day, Stanislas wanted to give Rousseau a present. He had made a sketch of the house in Môtiers-Travers where Rousseau had lived. Stanislas could draw rather well - after all, he had had excellent teachers -and Rousseau gratefully accepted the drawing but adamantly refused the drawings Stanislas had made of the view from the windows of this same house. They must have stirred dear but painful memories of a peaceful yet anxious period in his life.

The Parc Allows All Forms of Trees.

Chapter 4

Bliss and Gloominess

A couple of years later, Rousseau - purportedly hesitant - could be reassured that De Girardin would be a considerate host only by their mutual acquaintance, Le Bègue de Presle, physician and royal censor. On 20 May 1778 Rousseau suddenly decided to go, accompanied by Le Bègue de Presle, who had been able to charter a stagecoach that took them to Louvres. Here they managed to arrange a horse and carriage from the Marquis, which took them to Ermenonville, some 25 km north-east of Paris.

Rousseau had not even notified his friend Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, but did send various manuscripts – including his *Dialogues* and *Confessions* – to Paul Moultou, his ever-faithful publisher in Geneva. A few days later Thérèse Levasseur joined him in Ermenonville, just as Le Bègue de Presle had advised.

It was a moving reunion, much more so than De Girardin could have ever imagined, as he wrote later. Rousseau was so excited that as soon as he saw the park he could not be restrained any longer. For ages, all he had seen were trees covered in dust and soot, and here they were so fresh. He wanted to embrace them all, and continued on foot for more than a mile, hugging all the

Rousseau and Thérèse Levasseur.

Left Page: The Naïdes Grotto.

Trees Alongside the Lake.

trees he passed along the way. And as soon as the two men met, Rousseau cried: "Oh, Sir, it has been so long that my heart wanted to come, and now my eyes make me wish to stay here all my life." Meeting De Girardin's wife and children was just as touching, and Rousseau could not hold back his tears, "Oh, Madame, what can I say? You see my tears, they are the only ones I have shed of joy since a long time, and I feel that they remind me of life."

De Girardin, however, certainly had not been the first to invite Rousseau. A young nobleman from Malta, Flamandville, had offered him an old chateau near the

coast. The Count of Duprat had asked him to stay in a peaceful and quiet place, and a relatively new friend, Guillaume-Olivier de Corancez, had offered him nice and quiet quarters in Sceaux. All of these invitations he had declined, though; but now, almost a pauper, he gladly accepted De Girardin's kind invitation. Rousseau was given lodgings in a pavilion constructed partially in the walls surrounding the castle. The surrounding trees guaranteed his privacy as well as that of the Girardin family. Here he could await completion of the typically rural dwelling *Le petit Clarens*, which the Marquis was building especially for his tormented guest. Moreover, he got a master key (a *passe-partout*), which would open every door on the castle's grounds.

Barely had Rousseau arrived, when rumours circulated in Paris that his memoirs were about to be published. De Girardin was afraid that this news would upset his honoured guest, because he could be accused of bringing

"Le petit Clarens" Constructed by De Girardin for Rousseau.

friendships in jeopardy as a result of hitherto unknown revelations. When De Girardin brought up the topic, however, Rousseau reacted firmly and calmly: his manuscripts had been sent abroad; he was not at all ashamed about what he had written; in the end it was to show to the world with veracity what kind of man he had been; and, the manuscript that was apparently circulating in Paris could not have been his, he declared.

De Girardin was pleasantly surprised at Rousseau's calm and collected reaction, and he was glad he could offer his guest peace and quiet. Rousseau did not have to take care of anything, and could spend his days walking, day-dreaming and botanizing. No problems, no visitors, no letters. And as soon as he was surrounded by people who cared about him, and whom he cared about, he regained his '*bonhomie*' and gaiety, so Stanislas remembered.

Despite his earlier hypochondriacal view on his health, he enjoyed himself enormously. He took long walks and liked visiting the small orchard on the grounds of the chateau, which reminded him so strongly of *le verger de Clarens* in his *Julie*. The first time he saw the orchard, where a thatched cottage was being built especially for him and his wife, the old trees covered in moss filled him with joy. The magic of the old trees, which in any other place would have been cut down, spoke to his heart and touched him deeply, although he did not understand why. "I see them, and I feel it in the depth of my soul, here I find the gardens of my Julie."

The Picturesque Sheltered "Jetty" for Boarding Rowing

He also rowed frequently on the lake, which gained him his nickname '*notre amiral de l'eau douce*' (our fresh water admiral), he botanized with the Marquis' second son, Amable-Ours-Séraphin, whom he, in turn, nicknamed '*le petit gouverneur*,' played the piano-forte and sang and dined every now and then with the family.

A View at the Main Lake.

In fact, he was quite happy, and even proved congenial company for the children in the De Girardin family, playing with them and making them laugh, telling Swiss fairy tales. His favourite, however, was Amable, probably because of his wild nature, according to Stanislas, and because they frequently picked plants and flowers together. At least, he socialized in such a way that he made an ever-lasting impression; they really had started loving him.

Rousseau in Armenian Outfit.

De Girardin and his family occasionally enacted pastoral life at the chateau; at such occasions Madame De Girardin and her daughters were dressed in plain brown clothes, '*en amazones*,' (as amazons) with black hats, while the young men wore '*habillements le plus simples et le plus propres à les faire confondre avec les enfants des campagnards*,'[28] reported De Magellan, a Portuguese gentleman scholar in the *Gazette littérarie de l'Europe*[29] in 1778, when he gave account of Rousseau's stay in Ermenonville. The De Girardin family may have been sincere in their pastoral representation, but it could also have been a sympathetic gesture towards Rousseau, whom Madame d'Epinay had called 'the bear,' because of his rustic manners and outfit; and we can imagine that he must have had some troubles adjusting to etiquette at the chateau.

Musicians constantly perambulated the grounds, sometimes giving concerts in the woods to draw the attention of visitors to the park. Although Rousseau appreciated these musical performances, he avoided meeting other visitors, helped by Amable who knew every path in the park. However, when at night the musicians returned to the house, and performed in a room adjoining the hall, Rousseau enjoyed himself enormously. One day De Girardin let his musicians play Rousseau's *Le Devin de village* (1752) on *Île des peupliers*, which moved Rousseau

28 "the most simple of clothes, which were most suitable to make them look like the children of country folk."

29 Although some sources claim that this Gazette was short-lived and ceased to exist in 1765, it was continued until 1785.

Archery Shoot Where Rousseau Contested with the Local Villagers.

to tears and made him embrace his host, without knowing that just a few weeks later he would be buried on the island.[30]

When Marquis and Marquise de De Girardin opened a country fair, Rousseau mingled with the dancing young men and girls. Although he did not dance himself he participated in an archery contest, in which the noble couple handed the prizes to the winners of the contest. In 1783 the archers of Ermenonville still boasted that

30 Remarkably, some other guests of the Marquis also died in Ermenonville and were buried in the Park: the painters Meyer and Gandat.

19th Century Drawing of Rousseau's Cabin.

Rousseau had been a member of their 'brotherhood'; one even shot with Rousseau's bow and bought an arrow allegedly used by Rousseau at the time.

He enjoyed company, but also appreciated solitude from time to time. He seemed to have spent quite a lot of time rather far from the castle in a cabin located in '*le desert*,' staying in what was called '*la maison du Philosophe*,' now known as '*Le cabane de Rousseau*.'[31] Rousseau used to spend entire days here, reposing on its heath benches, while he was tending a fire of logs in the crude fireplace. He supplied himself with water from an adjoining spring, whereas his host provided bread and wine every morning in the cellar below, which Rousseau could enter by a trap door in the floor.

Nevertheless, he also enjoyed being in the village and soon he became a popular guest among the villagers. He chatted with passers-by and always had his pockets full of tobacco, which he gave to the farm hands he met on his hour-long '*promenades*.' He befriended the local *curé*

31 Unfortunately, the Cabane was not accessible to visitors in 2010, as it was recently used in a film shooting.

Rousseau's Cabin in the Park.

(pastor) who came to like him and admired his simplicity, his excessive sensitivity and generosity, although he admitted that he had never seen a man who was also a child. In their conversations the pastor avoided every topic that might upset his friend, and they mostly talked about the riches of nature, something he later regretted. After Rousseau's death the pastor noted that the De Girardins had changed noticeably, and that the village had suffered a genuine loss.

The ever so energetic Rousseau made various trips with the Marquis. On 16 June they went to Senlis by carriage, to pay a visit to Charles Leblanc, the mayor of Senlis. That same evening a feast was organized in honour of the '*philosophe*.' The next day they visited a number of dignitaries, including one of the city's historians, Mr Millet, who was a close friend of the Marquis. A couple of

days later, they walked to Dammartin, a small town some nine kilometres from Ermenonville. Corancez, who had invited Rousseau before, came to Ermenonville when he heard about these strenuous activities of Rousseau, as he was worried that these might kill him. Allegedly, he even had an argument with De Girardin about this.

Le Bègue de Presle also kept an eye out for his friend and on 21 June he came to Ermenonville, and found Rousseau at peace and happy. Another guest, De Magellan, the gentleman scholar from Portugal who travelled together with Le Bègue, wrote in the *Gazette*

View at Senlis by Samuel Chamberlain (1895-1975).

littéraire that Rousseau sang *La romance du Saule*[32] with a slightly broken and somewhat tired voice, accompanying himself on the piano forte, at the concert the Marquis had organized for Rousseau's latest piece of music, which he had just finished. It was this very evening that Madame la Marquise asked Rousseau to teach her music and singing, although according to De Girardin she was not very talented.

When Le Bègue de Presle went back to Paris, on the 26th of June, Rousseau asked him to bring back some paper for his herbariums and some coloured pencils for drawing the frames. He also asked for books about travelling which he could read to his wife and their maid to kill time during the long winter evenings. He also wanted some botanical works on plants, mosses and mushrooms. He even found time to turn to his (posthumously published, but unfinished) *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, to write the following chapters and do some editorial work: he even thought about re-editing his opera *Daphne et Cloé* and even the final part of *Emile*! Stanislas de De Girardin claimed that his father did all the editing of the *Rêveries* - since Rousseau had been writing on cards he carried with him all the time - and that he was the author of the book that became a landmark in French literature.

Death, however, was lurking, and came unexpectedly. On Tuesday, July 1, he went for a walk with his *'petit gouverneur'* after eating a bowl of strawberries with milk and sugar. It was a very hot day and he had to stop every

32 'Le Saule et sa douce verdure,' was Desdémone's lamentation in *Othello*, from Shakespeare.

Rousseau in his Final Minutes.

once and a while, which was nothing out of the ordinary as Amable told later. He had some sort of colic, which had disappeared when he came home for supper. Thérèse did not notice that something was wrong. The following morning he woke up at his usual time, went for a walk at sunrise and drank coffee with his wife. When she was about to tend to her household chores, Rousseau asked her to go and pay the bill of a local locksmith. When she returned a few moments later, she found Rousseau sitting in a chair leaning on a commode. Thérèse asked what was wrong, and Rousseau told her he felt great anxiety and intestinal pains. Without telling him, his wife sent the concierge to inform the De Girardins. Mme De Girardin arrived instantly, but when she asked him how he felt, Rousseau summoned her to leave, which she did.

Rousseau asked Thérèse to sit beside him and to open the window. He asked forgiveness for all the upsets she had experienced because of living with him. He asked her to thank the Marquis and his wife for their hospi-

tality, and said that he trusted her into their hands. He made clear that he wanted to be buried on the grounds of the chateau. "Remember me to *'le petit gouverneur'*; give to the poor of the village so they will pray for me. Do not forget the newly weds, whose marriage I arranged. And I commission you to have my body opened, after I am gone, by qualified people, and have them make a official report," were his last sentences.

We know that he asked for l'eau de Carmes,[33] of which he took a coffee spoon, which, in fact, did him good. Thérèse proposed taking a remedy, but he said that this was impossible because of his weakness. She then wanted to lay him on the bed, but did not have the strength. Then she tried to put a chamber pot underneath him; "What," he cried, "do you think that I am so weak that I can't get up?" And he flung himself from the bed onto the chair. His wife offered him a cup of broth; he drank a little, but then said: "My heart can't stand anything any longer." When Thérèse turned around to put the broth on the table, he fell on the wooden floor, dead, dragging his wife with him in his fall. His wife thought that he fell because of weakness and tried to pull him back on the chair, but then realizing that he was dead, she fainted.

In the meantime, the Marquis had come to the pavilion, entered the room with his master key, took Rousseau's hand and thought that he still felt some warmth. He tried to have Rousseau inhale the vapour of alkali fluoride; the physician he had called for began

33 This fragrance and medicine was made by the Carmelites of St. Just, in 1379, and composed of lemon, balm, aniseed, marjoram, thyme, sage, juniper berries, cardamom and angelica.

Rousseau's Death Mask.

letting blood and started cupping, because they were not certain he was really dead; it was, however, all in vain. When Thérèse came round, she started kissing her beloved life companion and could be pried away from him only with difficulty. Although she was inconsolable, she remembered telling De Girardin what her husband had commissioned: to have an autopsy. However, first, the Marquis had Houdon make a death mask. The next day the autopsy was executed by three surgeons: Gilles-Casimir Chenu, master surgeon of Ermenonville, Simon Bonnet from Montagny, Castérès, lieutenant of the First Surgeon of Senlis, and Bruslé de Villeron, physician in Senlis. The autopsy was attended by four more persons: the procurator-fiscal of the bailiwick of Ermenonville, Bimont, lieutenant Blondel and sergeant Landru. The pastor and the Marquis himself were also present. Le Bègue de Presle mentioned that there were eleven persons in total; the civil officers and the two surgeons were the only ones who signed the report of the autopsy, however.

No abnormalities were found; Rousseau's body showed healthy organs, veins and even his urinary tract, which had plagued him so much that most of his life he was unable to sexually perform normally, or so he claimed, did not show any abnormalities. However, when his skull was opened, a large intracerebral hemorrhage of some eight inches was found. Rousseau had died of severe apoplexy,[34] according to the verdict of the specialists.

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34 Apoplexy was the term used from the 14th until the 19th century to denote any sudden death with a loss of consciousness, whether due to heart failure, cerebral or aortic aneurysm, or even heart attacks.

Stone Plaque Bearing the Poem Dedicated to Rousseau.

Saturday, 4 July, Rousseau's body was embalmed and laid in a coffin of selected hardwood, lined with lead and various plates both on the inside and the outside indicating the time and place of death.

De Girardin, however, wanted a worthier tribute and came up with the following poem, which was inscribed in a stone, which later was placed opposite Île des peupliers:

"Ici, sous ces ombres paisibles,
Pour les restes mortels de Jean-Jacques Rousseau,
L'amitié posé a ce tombeau;
Mais c'est dans tous les coeurs sensibles,
Que cet homme divin, qui fut tout sentiment,
Doit trouver de son Coeur l'éternel monument." [35]

35 "Here, under these peaceful poplars, for the remains of JJR, friendship placed this tomb, but it is in the heart of all the sensitive hearts that this divine man must find his eternal monument."

Stone Plaque on the Shore of the Main Lake. In the Background Rousseau's Cenotaph.

Unfortunately, some sort of polemic was spun around this epitaph. Ducis, with whom De Girardin corresponded, consulted Mr Thomas and M. le Comte d'Angiviller and these gentlemen agreed that it was enough to put simply:

Jean-Jacques Rousseau,

BARBERIC HIC EGO SUM, QUIA
NON INTELLIGOR ILLIS

The Temple of Philosophy as Seen from the North.

Pilar of the Temple of Philosophy
Identifying Rousseau with Nature.

While rendering the suggestion that 'Vitam imprendere vero' could be added, too. 'Herewith,' Ducis, wrote, 'you will unite what made him, who he was, his enemies, his time, and his brave motto of which he is the martyr.' This was followed by a hymn praising Rousseau's virtues, which today may seem a little hypocritical. The letter ended with a poem abbreviated to four verses:

"Entre ces peupliers paisibles
Repose Jean-Jacques Rousseau
Approchez Coeur droits et sensibles
Votre ami dort sous ce tombeau."
Ducis' [36]

And yet, another epitaph was made; it was Lebrun who wrote:

"Parmi ces peupliers qu'entourne une onde pure
La centre de Jean-Jacques honore ce tombeau
C'est ici que repose, au sein de la nature,
Son peintre, son amant, le génie et Rousseau." [37]

De Girardin must have guessed what the real intention of the gentlemen was, and stuck to his own poem, but had the suggested Latin text put on the tomb, as it had been printed on the frontispiece of Rousseau's *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750).

At midnight Rousseau body was taken to Île *des peupliers* in a black barque, only accompanied by De Girardin, LeBègue de Presle and Corancez. The scene was illumi-

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36 "Between the peaceful poplars rests JJR, come closer upright and sensitive hearts, your friend sleeps neneath this tomb."

37 Under these poplars, which are surrounded by clear water, the very heart of Jean-Jacques honors this tomb. It is here that rests, in the bosom of nature, his painter, his lover, the genius of Rousseau."

The Île des peupliers.

nated by the torches of the farmers from Ermenonville. It was a solemn night, and the only disturbances were the strong wind rustling through the trees and the croaking of frogs.

Immediately after the news of Rousseau's death rumours were spread that he must have been poisoned or committed suicide. These rumours were denied tenaciously by the De Girardin family: '*Il est faux*,' Stanislas wrote in his memoires, '*et de tout fausseté qu'il soit empoi-*

sonne.'[38] His father even wrote a letter with all the details of his death that very same day, which was published in all the newspapers. With his letter he responded to Mme de Stael, who in a number of letters tried to prove Rousseau committed suicide. Despite the testimonials of witnesses of his death, his publisher, Mr Musset-Pathay, still believed that Rousseau committed suicide. 50 years later, in June 1828, Stanislas de Girardin decided to write him a letter in which he disproved all the assumptions on which this assertion was based.

Thérèse Levasseur, to whom Rousseau had wanted to "give his name," as Stanislas remarked[39], stayed in Ermenonville for some time. She was treated with respect, although she had always been considered an incongruent spouse to the great Rousseau. She lived in the pavilion until the spring of 1779 when she took lodgings

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38 "It is untrue, it is of the utter untruthfulness that he would have been poisoned."

39 Stanislas was right. Rousseau and Thérèse Levasseur were never lawfully wed. In fact, a faux marriage took place on 30 August 1768 in Bourgoin, where he took quarters with Thérèse at the first inn they passed, À la Fontaine d'Or, to spend the winter. They signed in under the name of Renou, which was Thérèse's mother's name. Here he wanted to meet his old friend Louis Donin de Rosère, the mayor of Bourgoin, who turned out to have died. He did meet, however, his successor, Luc de Champagneux and his cousin Louis Baptiste Jules Meradek, whom he invited to dinner, and to whom he introduced Thérèse in first instance as his sister. Some ten days later, however, in a reclosed room at the inn, the 'wedding' took place. To Rousseau this was the most important event in his entire life (he was 56!). Champeneux and Rosière were their witnesses, while Rousseau took the hand of Miss Renou and spoke of the friendship that had kept them together for 25 years and about the resolution that kept the knot of marriage together. There even was a banquet, and Rousseau was excited, sung some verses he had composed for the occasion, over dessert, and declared that he would stay in Bourgoin for the rest of his life.

in cottage *Le petit Clarens*. According to De Girardin, however, she misbehaved with her new friend - John Bally, nicknamed Hugo Montretout,[40] a 30-year old English valet and later groom of the Marquis. Her conduct was so inappropriate that he felt compelled to ask her to leave. A couple of days later, the Marquis received a letter from the valet in which he said he was sorry to leave Ermenonville, while adding:

> *"Mrs Rousseau wants to share her fortune with me, and I would be mad if I refused."*

Thérèse Levasseur and John Bally bought a cottage in Plessis-Belleville, not far from Ermenonville to escape from the, in their eyes, authoritarian Marquis. Here they lived in the shadow of a much milder master, the Prince de Conti, who rarely visited his chateau in Plessis. Thérèse showed no gratitude towards the Marquis, although the Marquis even went to Switzerland to rush publication of the complete works of Rousseau from which she would benefit financially. She wrote the Marquis when she left for Plessis-Belleville:

> *'I would not have thought that Mr de De Girardin would defame the wife of Jean-Jacques. You say that you love him, this honest man, and I tell you that is not the case. I will say all my life it is not true. Show me your love by rendering all the papers and the music and the Confessions; they do not belong to you. I want to profit from my rights; you have been profiting from them long enough. I leave your house, I don't owe you anything. I expect from you the grace of an honest man. I remain, with all respect possible, Sir,*
>
> *Fameu deu Gagangue'*

40 John Henry Bally called himself Nicolas Montretout

Thérèse held an enormous grudge against the Marquis, and tried to profit from the warm feelings so many highly placed persons in France and abroad had for her life-long partner. She spread rumours about how badly she had been treated by Rousseau's former friends and particularly by De Girardin. She disputed his rights to Rousseau's works, and spread the rumour that she had not received a single penny from the publishers. As both Thérèse and Rousseau had been a pious couple, while residing in Ermenonville, she became close friends with the *curé* of Plessis, who was not a friend of De Girardin either. He advised Thérèse and John to marry, as their cohabitation was somewhat irregular. John Bally approved of the plan despite being a protestant; he converted to Catholicism, and the couple prepared to get married. De Girardin, the Prince de Conti and other friends of Rousseau were very much against this marriage. De Conti came up with the most valid argument for Thérèse against marrying Bally. He explained to her that once she became Mme Bally, she would lose all her pensions she was entitled to as Rousseau's widow; which consisted of a handsome sum. Despite the fact that the *curé* of Plessis did his utmost to arrange her to marry John Bally, Thérèse suddenly changed plans, and the wedding was cancelled. Although the *curé* could not persuade her not to cohabit with Bally, his grudge against De Girardin led him to draw up a certificate that she was leading a virtuous and pious life, to help her get a grant from the Assemblée Générale. As the widow of so famous a man as Rousseau, she had become

Trees Bending over the Main Lake.

a rather well-known figure, and got *a priori* respect from those who did not know her personally. And the merry widow[41] benefited from this situation. She kept accusing the Marquis of stealing from her legacy by retaining the publication rights of several of Rousseau's works. She sought publicity, and at a certain point De Girardin

41 Lion Feuchtwanger (1894-1958) wrote an intriguing novel about Thérèse Levasseur and her lover John Bally.: *Narrenweisheit oder Tod und Verklärung des Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1952). It was so realistic that many historians thought it was an actual historic account.

felt compelled to publish a short, but detailed account of Thérèse's financial situation based on all the pensions and royalties she received; a respectable sum that was quickly squandered by her and Bally.

Despite the fact that she fell in disgrace, and most of Rousseau's friends thought she was an evil woman, she kept paying visits to *Île de peupliers* for many years. She died in 1801, 80 years old.

Chapter 5

Pilgrimage

The gardens of Ermenonville became a place of pilgrimage. Rousseau's reputation had risen to great heights. Stanislas de Girardin remembered three visits in particular: On 14 June 1780, an entire train of royal coaches entered Ermenonville, and De Girardin received Their Majesties, the entire Royal Family, the count and countess of Provence, the count and countess of Artois. Girardin now had the opportunity to show the gardens of Ermenonville, to the people who had been responsible for the layout of the Trianon. Marie-Antoinette sat on the stone bank, and was paid homage by the local girls, clad in white and wearing rose crowns decorated with a ribbon with the text:

Celle qui règne sur les cœurs
Doit trouver partout la couronne [42]

Queen Marie-Antoinette, who was moved by all the memories of Rousseau in the park and the way De Girardin had received her, asked what she could do for De Girardin in return. "Give my son a position in the army," the Marquis simply answered. She did, and al-

Stone Seat where Marie-Antoinette Sat when she Visited the Île des peupliers to Pay Her Respect to Rousseau.

42 She who rules the hearts, must find a crown everywhere.

though her request was not well-received, Stanislas obtained a position as *cadet-gentillehomme* and became the caretaker of the Chevalier and Marquis de Coigny in Vitry-le-Francais. Although Stanislas saw himself as a mediocre officer, he turned out to be one of the key figures during the French Revolution and a confidant of Napoleon Bonaparte.

For his father, René-Louis de Girardin the outcome of the Revolution was less favorable, despite his endorsement of social change. He got house arrest in 1793, which was lifted only after the fall of Robespierre. Nonetheless, when the Revolutionary Government wanted to take Rousseau's remains to the Pantheon in Paris in 1794, they asked for De Girardin's consent. He gave it hesitantly, as by now he clearly feared the consequences of saying " no," and could, as so many others before him, end under the guillotine. René de Girardin decided to leave Ermenonville never to return.

The second visit was that by a Mr Rousseau, who was a cousin of Jean-Jacques; the son of his father's brother who had left for Constantinople, where he became watchmaker to the court. He went to Isphahan in Persia; married a local woman with whom he got many children, and this was one of them, Stanislas realized. Mr Rousseau and his rather voluminous and much younger wife - who nursed her baby for everyone to see - were clad in Persian dress, which Stanislas described in great detail in his memoirs, including the tattoos on Rousseau's arms and hands of Jesus Christ, the Holy Virgin, Saint John, and the cross of Jerusalem.

Robespierre.

Portrait of Napoleon Bonaparte by Paul Laroche.

The third visit was the most telling; Napoleon Bonaparte, the First Consul – with whom Stanislas had worked closely together - who came to meditate at Rousseau's tomb. He remarked to Stanislas who showed him around:

> *"It would have been better for the peace of France that this man had never existed."*
>
> *"And why is that, Citizen Consul?" Stanislas asked.*
>
> *"It' s he who prepared the French Revolution," Napoleon answered.*
>
> *"It seems to me, Citizen Consul," said Stanislas, " that you have hardly something to complain about the Revolution."*

"The future will tell," answered Napoleon, " whether it wouldn't have been better for the tranquillity of the world, if Rousseau or I would never have existed." [43]

Perhaps it was because in his *Du contrat social* Rousseau had spoken so favourably about the Corsican people who drafted new code of law, that Napoleon paid his respects, and not because he saw him as the father of the Revolution? Rousseau so admired Corsica's move for independence that he seriously considered moving there when the continuing persecution in Môtiers (Switzerland) forced him to leave. It is hardly a coincidence that it was this Corsican soldier, who conquered all of Europe, who came to pay his respects not long after France suppressed Corsica's attempt.

Rousseau's remains were not to stay in Ermenonville. On September 16. 1794 the Constituent Assembly decided that Rousseau deserved public respect, and that his body was to be transferred to the Panthéon. The Assembly had a statue erected for the author of *Émile* and *of Contrat-Social* (sic). A public homage to his virtues and talents, the statue was not enough to demonstrate the nation's recognition. Early October Rousseau's tomb on *Île des peupliers* was opened and the inhabitants of Ermenonville accompanied him to Émile, a village close to Montmerency, where Rousseau wrote *Du contrat*

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43 Here Napoleon alluded to the part in the Gospel of Marc, wherein Jesus said: "Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me." And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, "*Is* it I? and another *said, Is* it I?"And he answered and said unto them, "*It is* one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish. The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! **good were it for that man if he had never been born**."

Transition of the Remains of J.-J. Rousseau to the Panthéon, October 11, 1794.

social, *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* and *Émile*. The next day the cortège started marching to Paris, arriving at the Place de la Révolution at half past five. It stopped shortly at Pont-Tournant, next to la Renommée, where by way of a grand finale several deputies of the convention received the remains of Rousseau; at this moment, the National Institute of Music started playing *Le Devin de Village*. The crowd pressed together around the wagon carrying Rousseau's remains and some who had paid a visit to Ermenonville thought they recognized the branches of the poplars that were used as decoration. In one of the basins of the Jardin National a faux *Île des peupliers* was built, and here the people paid respect to Rousseau's remains, just before he was interred in the Panthéon. His music was played again, which lent an almost religious atmosphere to the event. The inhabitants of the three villages, Émile, Francine and Groslay, where Rousseau had written his major works, walked along the cart carrying his statue, followed by the one that had carried his

remains from Ermenonville to Paris. There were officials from Geneva and the procession ended with the national convention carrying *Du Contrat-Social*, the beacon for legislators. Thus the cortège entered the Panthéon with the remains of the first person who dared write down the inalienable rights of mankind. Someone who did want to be dependent on others, who did not like intolerant fanaticism, or the sad doctrine of atheism, and who, in the end, was worthy of the name *L'homme de la nature et de la verité*,[44] according to Stanislas de Girardin.

Around 1800 Napoleon Bonaparte considered bringing Rousseau's remains back to their tomb on *Île des Peupliers*, and he actually gave orders to prepare their transportation by decreed, as he always did. Eventually he did not carry out his plan, and so to this very day Rousseau's tomb remained the cenotaph we still find on the *Île des peupliers*.

Ile des peupliers.

44 Man of nature and veracity.

French Summary

L'Élysée de Rousseau

Les six semaines passées à Ermenonville sont parmi les plus heureuses de la vie de Jean-Jacques Rousseau; ce furent hélas aussi ses dernières. Il y retrouva un environnement qui raviva son amour pour la nature dans laquelle l'homme ne se sentait pas seigneur et maître mais contemplateur du sublime, libéré de la lutte constante pour sa survie. Les jardins, le parc aménagés par le Marquis René-Louis de Girardin, inspirés par ses voyages et par le célèbre roman de Rousseau, *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, furent pendant six semaines sa maison.

Rousseau sortait d'une longue période de noire tristesse lorsqu'il accepta subitement l'invitation de De Girardin. Sa vie, ses pensées, son œuvre, sans cesse caractérisées par des dissensions presque insurmontables, restaient cependant toujours placées sous le signe de la relation entre l'homme et son environnement, son monde. Rousseau fut acclamé et vilipendé, connut des moments de gloire et de profonde tristesse mais resta toujours curieux du monde, de l'homme, du paysage, des arbres, des plantes qui l'entouraient. Le principe selon lequel une meilleure connaissance de l'homme et du monde devrait les rendre plus attachants, le fit se rapprocher des

East Side of the Chateau.

plantes, des fleurs et bien sûr de l'homme lui-même. Les plantes le rapprochèrent de la nature, l'homme primitif du contrat social entre les hommes.

À Ermenonville, il rencontra des personnes – la famille De Girardin – qui l'aimaient suffisamment pour l'accueillir dans leur intimité sans empiéter sur la sienne. L'écrivain / philosophe alors déjà si tourmenté y trouva le calme et l'hospitalité tant souhaités. Ses livres n'avaient-ils pas été brûlés, ne s'était-il pas vu refuser l'accès à l'Opéra, n'avait-t-il pas été obligé de fuir de ville en ville ? Il trouva ici le calme nécessaire pour herboriser et méditer à volonté et pour travailler à ses *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*. Il jouissait de la beauté du paysage, flânait pendant des heures dans le parc, faisait du canot sur le lac et accompagnait au *piano forte* ses propres compositions avec, comme public, la famille De Girardin.

Il donnait des leçons d'herborisation aux enfants De Girardin, parlait aux villageois, se rendit à la fête du village. Rousseau fut, sans aucun doute, très heureux à Ermenonville. Mais ce bonheur ne fut que de courte durée. Cette idylle prit fin de façon abrupte. Rousseau lui-même n'avait rien vu venir. Il avait acquis de nombreux livres, notamment sur la botanique, pour avoir de quoi s'occuper l'hiver. Le printemps était à peine terminé lorsqu'on le déposa, six semaines après son arrivée, dans une tombe creusée en hâte dans *l'Île des peupliers*. De nombreuses spéculations furent émises sur la cause de son décès et De Girardin se sentit agressé par des insinuations sur un possible empoisonnement ou suicide de Rousseau.

L'Île des peupliers devint un lieu de pèlerinage pour rois et philosophes, simples admirateurs et hommes d'état, Thérèse Levasseur et Napoléon. La réputation de Rousseau transcendant celle des jardins d'Ermenonville, sa dépouille fut transférée avec tous les honneurs au Panthéon de Paris, sépulture digne d'un roi. Ce qui resta était son cénotaphe, une tombe vide dans un parc rempli de souvenirs.

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Rousseau's Elysium

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) is generally seen as one of the most important figures whose ideas had a great influence on the French Revolution (1789). Many immediately associate him with the concept of "the noble savage." However, just as with his political and philosophical writings, his love for botany and scenery would change the landscape of continental Europe, if not the world.

This book presents a unique view of the young Rousseau's awakening love for plants, and his sometimes euphoric appreciation of the scenery during his endless walks. The author unfolds the development of Rousseau's concept of nature, which makes it possible to pinpoint the exact and pivotal moment of change in his thinking about the natural environment. This culminated in a vision that converged with the the Marquis de Girardin's ideas about landscaping. The reader follows the Marquis during the development of the first English Garden in France, where Rousseau probably spent the happiest weeks of his life. While the park represents Rousseau's dream come true, it was destined to become the place of both his death and his tomb.

In text and photographs this book captures the character of the park, built around the concepts of two men of fundamentally different character. It is the park's intricate mixture of bliss and gloominess that put a spell on the reader and every visitor.

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