

## Some introductory remarks

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When Friedrich Schiller is mentioned in connection with the subject of landscape, the poem *Der Spaziergang* (The stroll) immediately comes to mind. This elegy, apart from being among his most famous *Philosophical Poems*, has also become considered a central text of the modern theory of landscape as presented in Joachim Ritter's essay, an indispensable point of reference for this subject: *Landschaft. Zur Funktion des Ästhetischen in der modern Gesellschaft* (Landscape. The Function of the Aesthetic in Modern Society) of 1963. In *Der Spaziergang* (in Ritter's view) "we find all of the formative elements of nature as landscape united in a grand synthesis: the wayfarer who "leaves" his home, "having finally fled the prison of the cramped room", "happily", seeking refuge in nature, and all of nature that opens "to he who freely accommodates the view of the serene blue sky", of the "obscurity of mountains", of the "green woods [...]". Finally, the wayfarer, subject to the landscape, is considered alien to the "felicitous population of farmers" and to his "uncontaminated" nature. Only for he who ventures out does nature become landscape, to which the city, which "rises up in turrets from stone" (Ritter 1963: 158) now also belongs.

The text which we are presenting here for the first time in English, Schiller's review of the *Taschenkalender auf das Jahr 1795 für Natur- und Gartenfreunde* (Pocket Almanac for the friends of nature and gardens) is hardly known. In Italian, it was translated and commented on by Giovanna Pinna who included it in an anthology of texts by Schiller on landscape.<sup>1</sup> Here Schiller drew inspiration from observations of a contemporary, a theorist and aficionado of landscape gardening Gottlob Heinrich Rapp – to discuss his passion for English gardens that were then springing up all over Germany.

In the second half of the 18th century, landscape gardening figured centrally in aesthetic discussions, assuming an importance that it would not have again in the two following centuries and is perhaps only today beginning to reacquire.<sup>2</sup> Lorenz Hirschfeld, who is actually cited by Schiller at the beginning

<sup>1</sup> See F. Schiller, *Der Spaziergang*.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the titles cited above, see at least Cooper 2006,

of his text, was known for his impressive *Theory of Landscape Gardening*, published between 1779 and 1785 in five volumes. Almost every aesthetic treatise of the time placed landscape gardening on a par with the 'higher' arts. From here a discussion began that is also quite prominent in Schiller's text which is presented here, on landscape gardening being made a part of the canon of arts that was so significant to 18th century aesthetics. Was the garden approaching architecture or was it more assimilated by painting? This was not just a futile systematic question, since underlying it was the problem of taste that garden lovers were certainly more than aware of and which anyone who planned a garden at the time was confronted with. Was one to follow the new taste that was spreading from England - one that advocated a garden appearing as natural as possible, abandoning or concealing all enclosures and boundaries, and in short inspired by the *painting* of landscape? Or was one to stay true to the *architectural* garden, the French-style garden? The one, which, elaborating a model that was born in 16th century Italy, had celebrated its pomp at Versailles with Le Notre and shaped nature in geometric forms, tracing the gravel promenades around square hedges, opening up orthogonal perspectives, using fountains and statues as points of reference.

Schiller, who was abreast of these discussions, not only the one on the systematic status of landscape gardening, also discussed by Kant in his *Critique of Judgment*, but also the one regarding landscape garden vs. geometric garden. But it is as if he wanted to avoid a position that is too restrictive: clearly ascribing the garden to either architecture or to painting, on the one hand, or exclusively advocating the naturalness of the English-style garden vs. the artificiality of the French-style garden, on the other. Thus while refusing to definitively side with the pictorial conception or the architectural one of the garden, he sought a "satisfying middle path between the rigidity of the French-style garden and the unchecked freedom of the so-called English garden", while not forgetting that it would be wrong to exclude every trace of artificiality and above all every connection to the cultivated landscape from a garden.

Is this text only of documentary and historical value? Far from it. The short text by Schiller confronts us head-on with problems that are still important today. Even if the wording is invariably that of 18th century aesthetics and the question of integrating the garden in the *système des beaux arts* is also no longer a burning issue, there are very topical issues among those addressed by Schiller. First and foremost, that of the relationship that exists between garden and landscape, and that of the role of the garden as a model of landscape.

Garden and landscape are closely interrelated for us, too, not just in general understanding but also in professional expertise (a landscape designer often plans gardens) and they are certainly linked in theory. In the reflections of

Rosario Assunto who with his pioneering *Il paesaggio e l'estetica*, of 1973, has reopened, at least in Italy, the discussion on landscape, garden and landscape are almost a 'hendyadis', and the garden above all is elevated to the ideal of landscape. This is what Assunto is trying to say when speaking about the garden as 'absolute landscape'. The garden represents the perfection of landscape, its consummation, since, in the garden, we find in crystallized or concentrated form the aesthetic experience that is widespread in landscape (Assunto 1973).

We find similar arguments also in theorists closer to our time, most notably in *Court traité du Paysage* by Alain Roger, from 1997. Here landscape and garden are united in the common origin of landscape painting, both being the fruit of the projection *sur nature* of an ideal born in painting.

In the philosophical orientations strongly influenced by the ecological movement, the assimilation of landscape in gardening assumes a different, much more programmatic value. The German philosopher Gernot Böhme claims that the garden is the idea of nature that we should pursue, for the very reason that it is can contribute to a "humanization of nature" (Böhme 1989: 95). Here it is about a utopian and humanist vision of nature as an order that is conducive to the harmonious development of life. Gardens are indeed reassuring, benign places, considerably more so than nature generally speaking. It is an irenic orientation equally visible in Gilles Clément who not just by chance describes himself as being more of a 'gardener' than a 'landscapist', endorsing the idea of a 'planetary garden' of earth as a 'shared closed space' to be cared for like a garden. It is thus necessary to let the earth prosper "without any human intervention", allowing "natural forces to find best expression" (Clément 2012 *passim*). A position, clearly, that is based on the idea that ecosystems always regulate themselves to the benefit of man and that artificial interventions are always disruptive and damaging.

This myth of a nature that is always favorable to man also risks being one-sided and dangerous like the opposite, Promethean one that exalts the possibility of man doing whatever he wishes with nature. In view of such extreme positions, Schiller's balanced view appears all the more circumspect! He clearly recognizes the contradiction inherent in the idea of an absolutely natural garden and while he critiques the limitations of the architectural ideal of the garden, the violence that it imposes on nature, he does not forget that also the freest of landscape gardens is always the result of the collaboration of man and nature and never a spontaneous gift of nature itself.

Perhaps what these pages of Schiller's text teach is to not view in absolute terms the aesthetic contrast between the natural and the artificial and to accommodate, at least in the seeming naturalness of the English-style garden, efforts to cultivate nature. We should learn from him to appreciate not only wild

nature but also the labor of agriculture, nature that is useful, alongside that which is sublime. Undoubtedly, the romantic taste of nature, which began to take hold at the time of Schiller's writing, resulted, for at least two centuries, in wild nature being favored over nature in a cultivated state, *wilderness* over nature that had been worked on by man. This model, however, proves inadequate in view of a landscape, like the Italian one in specific or the European one in general, in which the hand of man has left its trace in agricultural practices, historical settlements, buildings and monuments. Perhaps this is what we can really learn from the garden, namely to appreciate cultivated landscape, one that has been shaped by man in keeping with nature and not against nature itself. On closer scrutiny, the garden aligns itself not with the nature of wilderness but with agriculture, which as Giulio Carlo Argan has written, represents the qualitative maximum or maximum aesthetic value" (Argan 1958: 156). Could this mean that the 'landscapist' Schiller is a most topical contemporary theorist of landscape?

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