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Carmontelle, *Garden at Monceau*, edited by Elizabeth Barlow Rogers and Joseph Disponzio, translated by Andrew Ayers. New York, NY and Upperville, VA: The Foundation for Landscape Studies and Oak Spring Garden Foundation, 2020. 196 pp. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$75.00 U. S. (hb). ISBN 9780300254686.

Review by Lauren R. Cannady, University of Maryland, College Park.

Garden designers understand what it means to create under the shadow of obsolescence—to foresee the demise of their creation before its completion. They know to expect that the natural world will one day reclaim the landscape and that structures will only withstand the elements for so long before falling into ruin. Such a condition must have been particularly familiar to Louis Carrogis, or Carmontelle, the eighteenth-century French draftsman, surveyor, tutor, playwright, garden designer, portraitist, inventor, and art critic who made a career of orchestrating ephemeral productions and one-off spectacles. Among his most notable achievements was the garden he designed at Monceau on the edge of Paris between 1771 and 1779 for Louis-Philippe-Joseph, duc de Chartres (better known by his Revolution-era sobriquet, Philippe-Égalité), in whose longterm employ Carmontelle served as principal entertainer-factotum. Monceau was a picturesque garden, and Carmontelle described it as such in so many words, writing that to achieve a handsome garden, one should never forget “to contemplate nature’s most beautiful effects, which one should study as a Painter” (p. 8).

Though Carmontelle favorably compared Monceau to the picturesque gardens of his English and French contemporaries, some of whom he commended but most of whom he criticized, Monceau was unlike the late-eighteenth-century picturesque gardens laid out and theorized by his peers. Modest in scale and maximalist in design, Monceau was less pastoral retreat than pleasure park—packed as it was with follies ranging from a ruined castle, windmill, and minaret on a hillock to Tartar and Turkish tents, a chinoiserie carousel, and an ornamental farm. Carmontelle designed Monceau to be a “pure amusement” (p. 7) for the duc de Chartres and seems to have dared his patron to not be continually surprised and delighted at every turn. The garden was so *au courant* that it was already falling out of fashion before the finishing touches were added. Indeed, in 1783, the duc de Chartres hired Scottish gardener Thomas Blaikie to temper Carmontelle’s picturesque fantasy. Ever the astute observer, Carmontelle read the writing on the wall and, before his work could be altered or erased, he archived it through the publication in 1779 of *Jardin de Monceau*, a brief text—more descriptive than theoretical—and eighteen engraved plates, which he advertised in a prospectus of 1778 and sold via a subscription scheme.

Garden at Monceau is the first English translation (by Andrew Ayers) of Carmontelle's 1779 publication. This elegant new edition combines Carmontelle's prospectus and text with facsimile reproductions of the eighteen engravings from an edition held by the Oak Spring Garden Foundation. Edited by Elizabeth Barlow Rogers and Joseph Disponzio, *Garden at Monceau* pairs Carmontelle's text with eight contextual essays by garden, art, and cultural historians and landscape architects, many of whom have published elsewhere on Carmontelle, including noted scholar Laurence Chatel de Brancion who here deftly outlines Carmontelle's sweeping career and artistic production in her introductory essay.

"The pleasure of a natural Garden," Carmontelle explained, "is to find in it at every step a Scene; & each feature must be disposed so as to produce many, according to the different effects of light" (p. 16). This passage reveals the indebtedness of Carmontelle's conception of the picturesque garden not only to the illusory compositions and surfaces of painting but equally to the theatrical stage. The engraved plates and descriptive text of *Jardin de Monceau* suggest an itinerary through the garden, which offers itself up as a series of sequential scenes the visitor-viewer might encounter, backdrops against which the drama—or more often banality—of aristocratic life played out. Susan Taylor-Leduc, in her essay in the volume, observes the purposeful and playful disconnect Carmontelle introduced between the plates and corresponding descriptions, the latter of which do more to disorient the reader-viewer than logically guide them through the proposed garden itinerary. Because Carmontelle intended the various scenes he arranged around Monceau to be seen in a particular way, he indicated optimal vantage points in his text that correspond to points on the general plan, while also acting like spikes marking the stage for actors. *Plate IV*, for instance, features a ruined Gothic castle and human-made river, both of which are examples of what David L. Hays, in his contribution based on research in the Archives nationales, describes as Carmontelle's manipulation of temporality on the grounds of Monceau. While the garden was developed over the span of a decade, as the duc de Chartres acquired or leased neighboring parcels of land one by one, the deep history suggested by Carmontelle's pseudo-historical ruins was another of the artist's illusions.

Among the other fashionable features at Monceau were French imaginings of cultural others, including an Ottoman-style tent and apparently Chinese-style bridge and carousel. French tastes for turquerie and chinoiserie extended from the built environment to the bodily adornments of aristocratic women, as Caroline Weber outlines in her essay. Because the engravings from *Jardin de Monceau* include depictions of elite visitors wearing the latest fashions, these ostensible landscapes share affinities with contemporary fashion plates. The duchesse de Chartres was among the most fashion-forward and one imagines that the garden at Monceau doubled as a *défilé de mode* for her and the women in her orbit to see and be seen. The situation and layout of the garden was such that it was a site to occupy for privileged Parisians, and a sight to behold through furtive glances for those less so. Monceau, which Gabriel Wick aptly characterizes as a semi-public "private" garden, was also a stage on which the duc de Chartres performed his own libertinage and cultivated an elite Parisian public through demonstrations of his largesse by allowing them access to his garden. In addition to an attention to visibility and primacy placed on the sensory pleasures of sight at Monceau, there was also a sonic dimension to the garden. In her essay on the professional and amateur musicians who gathered around the duc de Chartres, many of whom Carmontelle depicted in a series of intimate painted portraits (some of which are illustrated in this volume), Florence Gétreau adds further dimensionality to the study of Monceau by evoking the soundscape of the picturesque garden.

A fascinating contemporary comparison can be drawn between Carmontelle's *Jardin de Monceau* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, written between 1776 and 1778 and published posthumously in 1782. Both authors addressed their critics, and both confronted the triangulation of society, urbanity, and the natural world. One wonders what Rousseau made of Monceau when the philosopher wandered over to the garden on one of his promenades spent botanizing in self-reflective reverie around Paris. In her memoirs, Madame de Genlis, lady-in-waiting to the duchesse de Chartres, mistress to the duc de Chartres, and an author in her own right, recalled having given a key to the garden at Monceau to Rousseau in 1773 or 1774 so he could visit at will without being inconvenienced by the ticketed entry system.[1] Perhaps Rousseau was drawn to the non-native botanical and arboreal specimens—the ebony and sycamore trees and other plants that Carmontelle planted, inventoried by Elizabeth Hyde in her essay. The connections between philosopher and artist go further still as Rousseau spent his final days at the estate of Ermenonville as a guest of René-Louis de Girardin, whose picturesque garden Carmontelle held in high regard (p. 15). In the “Ninth Walk” from *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, Rousseau praised the natural world as a literal and metaphorical escape from the notoriety he experienced in polite Parisian society:

“I used to enjoy living in society, when I saw only affection in everyone’s eyes or at worst indifference in the eyes of those to whom I was unknown. But today [...] I quickly hurry off to the countryside; as soon as I see the greenery, I begin to breathe. Is it any surprise that I love solitude?”[2]

One would imagine that such an elite amusement park where people went to “see and be seen” would have presented a particular type of misery for the long-persecuted Rousseau; yet, according to Madame de Genlis, he visited, and did so apparently quite often. In *Jardin de Monceau*, Carmontelle asserted that, “We would find few charms in the countryside without those of society” and continues, “Despite the charms that nature can offer, we require good food, hunting, games, concerts, shows” (pp. 13-14). As Joseph Disponzio rightly observes, Carmontelle seems to have been in on the joke. Given that his tone in *Jardin de Monceau* is knowing and his authorial position is rather defensive, one wonders to what extent Carmontelle, ever the keen social observer, was merely responding to trends with his garden and giving his patron exactly what he wanted at that moment. Taken at their word, Rousseau and Carmontelle contradict one another; their respective writings illuminating the in-betweenness of gardens at the crossroads of nature and culture.

It should come as little surprise that an ancien regime prince of the blood would have the hubris to commission—and imagine himself in possession of—an encyclopedic pleasure garden meant to conjure cultures, experiences, and geographies past and present. For one of the wealthiest members of the Orléans branch of the royal family to have a garden in Paris that evoked “all places & all times” (p. 14) was also to make a spectacle of the imperial and colonial reach of France. Beyond the fetishization of the exotic mentioned in several of the essays, such as the statues in Chinese costumes that support the carousel as a structure of amusement or the turbaned servant walking a camel on a lead, there are other examples—particularly those related to Black figures—that merit further contextualization and scholarly consideration. One is the sculptural grouping by Jean-Antoine Houdon, which was installed at Monceau in 1779 and described by Carmontelle as “[...] the figure of a woman in white marble, who is bathing & a bronze Negress, who is pouring water onto her body. These two figures are by M. Houdon” (p. 20). Houdon made his expression of racial difference and hierarchy explicit through materiality, and it was not until

several years into the Revolution that he recast the “bronze Negress” as an abolitionist symbol.[3]

Another example of a subjugated Black body that goes uninterrogated in this volume appeared on the pouf worn by the duchesse de Chartres to the opera in 1774. The pages of the *Mémoires secrets de Bachaumont*, cited in Weber’s essay, reported that “a little Negro resembling her beloved African page” (p. 107) was affixed, along with a subtropical parrot, to the duchess’ fashionable coiffure as ornament.[4] Finally, there is Carmontelle’s portrait of Narcisse, identified by Gétreau as the duchesse de Chartres’ Black servant (p. 117). Among the more prominent sartorial features of this young man playing a flute is the Orléans coat of arms emblazoned on his coat. These examples belie the more sinister reality of 1770s France when Carmontelle worked for the duc de Chartres and designed Monceau: namely, the issuance in August of 1777 of the *Déclaration du Roi pour la Police des Noirs*, a law that surveilled and regulated Black bodies on French soil. White Frenchmen, including the duc de Chartres and other princes of the blood, were required to register the Black men, women, and children in their household. In a letter dated December 4, 1777, Jean-Charles-Pierre Lenoir, lieutenant of police, reported to the Ministre de la Marine that Chartres was served by Aladin (aged 35) and Scipion (aged 7) and that his wife was served by Narcisse (whose age is not given). In the same letter Lenoir stated that the duke and duchess “regarded them as free and that [the three] were treated as such.”[5] Whether Aladin, Scipion, and Narcisse were bound to the Chartres household by enslavement or servitude matters little since, as Anne Lafont has argued, the seemingly comfortable and privileged positions of Parisian servants like Narcisse distort and falsify the simultaneous French possession and exploitation of Black bodies on distant colonial plantations.[6] Furthermore, the money to finance the follies of Monceau came, at least in part, from Chartres’ marriage to the wealthiest heiress in France. The duc de Penthièvre, Chartres’ father-in-law, benefitted directly and indirectly from his titular roles as Admiral of France and Governor of Brittany, the province that included the major slave-trading port of Nantes. While the duc de Chartres might have fomented anti-absolutist, proto-revolutionary sentiment around him in the 1780s at the Palais-Royal, and voted for the king’s execution in 1792 as Philippe Égalité, this other part of his history, the period that coincides with Carmontelle’s work at Monceau, bears acknowledgement at the very least. For all the ways that Monceau represented Carmontelle’s theatrical imaging of “all times & all places,” it was, ultimately, the mirror of a very particular time and place, and a monument to princely privilege in ancien regime France.

Garden at Monceau makes available to English-speaking readers for the first time this important late-eighteenth-century contribution to picturesque garden theory and practice. The translation and new insights from a multidisciplinary cohort of scholars make *Garden at Monceau* a welcome addition to both Carmontelle studies and French garden and landscape histories. Of particular note are the volume’s beautifully reproduced plates with which Carmontelle permanently fixed Monceau as he intended it to be seen: as a series of staged scenes from prescribed vantage points without the quotidian inconveniences of the seasons, the uneven growth patterns of plants, a fickle Parisian public, or a perpetually bored patron.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Laurence Chatel de Brancion, “Carmontelle and his World”

David L. Hays, "History by Design: The Aesthetics of Transformation in Carmontelle's Jardin de Monceau"

Caroline Weber, "Fashion Follies at the *folie de Chartres*"

Florence Gétreau, "Carmontelle's Portraits of Musicians"

Elizabeth Hyde, "'The Habit of Seeing the Same Things Often': Planting the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century France"

Gabriel Wick, "Monceau, the *Mémoires secrets*, and the Colisée: The Reinvention of the duc de Chartres à l'anglois"

Joseph Disponzio, "A Spade in the Garden or a Garden in Spades: Louis Carrogis de Carmontelle's *Jardin de Monceau* or the Garden as Dramatic Proverb"

Susan Taylor-Leduc, "*En-jeux*: Viewing, Mapping, and Playing in Carmontelle's Prospectus and *Jardin de Monceau*"

NOTES

[1] Stéphanie Félicité Genlis (comtesse de), *Mémoires de Madame de Genlis (en un volume)*, ed. M. F. Barrière (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1878), p. 105.

[2] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. by Russell Goulbourne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 103.

[3] Anne L. Poulet, ed., *Jean-Antoine Houdon: Sculptor of the Enlightenment*, exh. cat. (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 241-5.

[4] *Mémoires secrets de Bachaumont, 1762-1787*, ed. M. J. Ravenel, new ed., vol. 4 (1772-1774) (Paris: Brissot-Thivars, 1830), p. 336. "À gauche est un petit nègre, image de celui qu'elle aime beaucoup."

[5] Maurice Besson, "La police des noirs sous Louis XVI en France," *Revue de l'histoire des colonies françaises* XXI (1928): 433-46, pp. 434-5. Lenoir to Antoine de Sartine: "M. Fontaine vient de me marquer que Mgr le duc de Chartres a deux nègres, l'un nommé Aladin, âgé de 35 ans, l'autre nommé Scipion âgé de 7 ans. Il m'a ajouté que Madame la Duchesse avait un nègre nommé Narcisse, que leurs Altesses Sérénissimes les regardaient comme libres et qu'ils étaient traités en conséquence."

[6] Anne Lafont, *L'Art et la race: L'Africain (tout) contre l'œil des Lumières* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2019), p. 141.

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