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Concerning the Garden Calendar of 1795

Friedrich Schiller

Introduced and translated by Cody Staton*

By the late eighteenth century, strolling gardens had become a craze of the public throughout Europe. Whereas the French insistence on formalism in gardens satisfied the rules of the intellect with its symmetrical lanes, vegetation wrenched and twisted into topiary and espaliers, the emergence of the English landscape garden drove the imagination into the opposite direction of near lawless design through serpentine lanes, ponds, and paths leading to different rooms, the rejection of geometrical patterns, and the feeling of movement in every perspective. In this short public address by Schiller, he advocates for the German taste in gardens to strike a balance between the two extremes and to discover its unique style on a par with its nation's taste in other aesthetic and moral categories. Schiller comments on the addition of the garden at Hohenheim to the 1795 calendar tour of gardens made by the theorist Christian Clay Lorenz Hirschfeld. Schiller commends this addition for the surprising and seeming contradictions brought into harmony when viewed from the point of view of each contributing to the whole. Schiller praises this garden for its exaltation of both art and nature, for the man of high culture is brought back to feeling, while the simple man is elevated through imagination and reason. This is no doubt a continuation of Schiller's theory given in the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* that imaginative play not only harmonizes both matter and form, but also elevates them both by incorporating higher aspects of each into one another. For Schiller, the artful arrangement of the garden excels at achieving this act of play.

The German text can be found in Friedrich von Schiller, *Sämmtliche Werke*, Original-Ausgabe, 18th volume, Wien: 1820, 266–76.

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Text

Since Hirschfeld's writings on garden art, the love of beautiful artistic gardens has become more and more common in Germany, but not much to the advantage of good taste, because there was a lack of fixed principles and everything was left to the mere power of individual choice (*Willkür*). In order to correct the misguided taste in this art, this calendar provides excellent tips that deserve to be examined more closely by the art lover and to be followed by the garden lover.

Is it not altogether unusual to begin doing something and to then ask yourself whether it is at all possible? Indeed, this seems to be particularly the case with the aesthetic gardens that have become so pervasively popular. Our northern taste comes from such an ambiguous origin and has so far shown such an uncertain character that the true art lover may be forgiven for hardly granting [these gardens] even a passing glance, and for leaving it all to the play of dilettantism (*Dilletantism*). Uncertain as to which class of the fine arts that it should actually belong to, garden art for a long time was associated with architecture, with sculpted living vegetation under the rigid yoke of mathematical forms, whereby the architect dominated lifeless, heavy earthen objects (*Masse*). The tree had to hide its higher organic nature so that art could demonstrate its power over the tree's common physical nature. It had to give up its beautiful, independent life for a spiritless symmetry while its light, floating stature [was sacrificed] for an appearance of solidity, such as the eye demands from stone walls. Garden art has come back from this strange and errant path of late, but only to lose itself on the opposite path. Taste in gardens thus fled from the strict discipline of the architect into the freedom of the poet, suddenly exchanging the harshest servitude for the most unruly [poetic] license, and from then on wanting to receive its law from the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) alone. The eye was then forced to jump from one arbitrary and unexpected decoration to the next, for the imagination (*Phantasie*), left to its own devices, is adventurous and colorful and will transform its images, while nature, whether considered in a large or small area, was made to present the whole array of its phenomena on a sampling tray (*Musterkarte*). Just as in the French gardens, [the imagination] was deprived of its freedom, but compensated for it by a certain architectural

harmony and size, so now, in our so-called English gardens, it sinks into childish infancy in which it distinguished itself through an exaggerated striving for informality and variety removed from beautiful simplicity by evading all rules. It remains in this state for the most part, favored very little by the soft character of time, which flees from all definition of form and finds it infinitely more convenient to model objects according to its ideas rather than conforming to them.

Since it is so difficult to assign aesthetic garden art its place among the fine arts, one could easily come to the conclusion that it cannot be included here at all. But one would be wrong to allow the failed attempts to testify against their possibility at all. The two opposite forms under which it has appeared with us so far contain something true and both arose from a well-founded need.

As far as architectural taste is concerned, it cannot be denied that garden art is in the *same* category as architecture, although it has been very wrong to try to apply the conditions of the latter to the former. Both arts initially correspond to a physical need, which initially determines their forms, until the developed sense of beauty presses for freedom from these forms and at the same time taste makes its demands along with the understanding. When viewed from this standpoint, the two arts are not completely free, for the beauty of their forms will always remain conditioned and limited by this inexhaustible physical purpose. Both also have in common that they imitate nature not through an artificial medium but through nature itself, if even they imitate it at all, as they may rather create new objects. Hence, it may have been that [gardeners] did not adhere very strictly to the forms presented by the reality (*Wirklichkeit*) [of nature itself], as they did not care about regarding nature as a means to their own ends, and of thus doing violence to nature, so long as the understanding was satisfied with order and harmony and the eye was satisfied through [the appearance] of majesty and grace. One could then believe that one was all the more justified in doing so, since obviously in [landscape] gardening (*Gartenkunst*), as in architecture, the physical purpose is very often promoted precisely through this very sacrifice of natural freedom. The founders of this architectural taste in garden art can, therefore, be forgiven to some extent for allowing themselves to be seduced by the similarity that exists in many respects between these two arts, and for confusing their very different characters by choosing between order and freedom and giving favor to the former at the expense of the latter.

On the other hand, the poetic taste in gardens is also based on a very true fact of feeling. An attentive observer of himself could not fail to notice that the pleasure with which we are filled by the sight of landscape scenery is

inseparable from the idea that they are works of nature, not of artists. So, as soon as gardening taste aimed at this type of enjoyment, it had to be careful to remove all traces of an artificial origin in the garden. [The gardener] thus made freedom his supreme law, just as his architect predecessor had made regularity his law; for the former, nature had to prevail, while for the latter the hand of man had to triumph. But the end to which he strove was far too great for the means to which his art had limited him, and he failed because he stepped outside his limits and thus carried garden art into painting. He forgot that the reduced standard which the latter uses could not be very well applied to an art that represents nature in itself, as it can then only be moving insofar as it is absolutely confused with nature. It is of no wonder, then, that in his struggle for diversity he fell into frivolity and into arbitrariness (*Willkürliche*) because he lacked the space and strength for the transitions through which nature prepares and justifies its changes. The ideal toward which he strove contained no contradiction in itself; but it was contrary to its goal and, hence, absurd, because even the happiest success did not reward the enormous sacrifices.

So, if garden art is finally to come back from its excesses and, like its other sisters, rest between definite and permanent boundaries, then one must first of all have made it clear to oneself what one actually wants, a question which, in Germany at least, has not yet been addressed, nor does it seem to have been thoroughly thought through. A very good middle way will then probably be found between the rigidity of French garden taste and the lawless freedom of the so-called English taste. It will become clear that this art should not rise to such high levels as those who, in their designs, forget nothing except what the means of execution would like to persuade us, and that it is absurd to enclose the world into a garden wall, but that it is very feasible and sensible to make a garden that meets all the requirements of the good farmer in order to form a characteristic whole both for the eye and the heart and mind.

This is what the ingenious author of the fragmentary contributions to the development of German garden taste has excellently pointed out in this calendar, and of all that has ever been written on this subject we know of nothing that would be so satisfactory to healthy taste. It is true that his ideas are only jotted down in fragments, but this negligence in form does not extend to the content, which consistently shows a fine understanding and a delicate artistic feeling. After having identified and properly named the two main paths that garden art has taken so far and the various purposes that can be pursued in gardens, he endeavors to bring this art back to its true limits and to a reasonable purpose, which he rightly indicates as "increasing the

enjoyment of life through an interaction with the beautiful landscape that nature can give us." He very correctly distinguishes the garden landscape (the actual English park)—in which nature appears in all its grandeur and freedom and appears to have devoured the garden—from the garden where art as such can become visible. Without denying the aesthetic merit of the former, the author is content to expose the difficulties connected with its execution, which can only be overcome by extraordinary force. He divides the actual garden itself into large, small, and medium varieties, briefly outlining the boundaries within which the invention of each of these three types must remain. He vehemently opposes the Anglomania of so many German gardeners, and is thus against bridges without water, against the hermitages on country roads, and so on. He reveals the misery resulting from an addiction to imitation and a misunderstanding of the principles of variety and freedom from coercion.

But by narrowing the boundaries of garden art, the gardener teaches it to be all the more effective within it by striving for a specific and interesting character through the sacrificing of what is unnecessary and counterproductive. He, therefore, does not consider it impossible to create symbolic and at the same time emotive (*pathetische*) gardens, which should be just as capable of expressing and creating a certain emotional state as musical or poetic compositions.

In addition to these aesthetic remarks, the same author has begun a description of the large gardens in Hohenheim in this calendar, which he promises to continue next year. Anyone who has either seen this justly famous garden for themselves or only knows it by word of mouth must find it pleasant to wander through it in the company of such a fine art connoisseur. He will probably be no less surprised than the reviewer to see an idea prevailing in a composition that one was so inclined to consider to be the work of arbitrariness, which does little honor to the author or the one describing the garden. Most travelers who have had the privilege of visiting the Hohenheim garden have, not without great astonishment, seen Roman tombs, temples, dilapidated walls, etc., alternating with Swiss huts or smiling flowerbeds with black prison walls. They could not understand how the power of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) allowed itself to combine such disparate things into a whole. The idea that we have before us a rural colony that settled among the ruins of a Roman city suddenly removes this contradiction by bringing a spiritual unity to this baroque composition. Rural simplicity and sunken urban splendor, the two extreme states of society, border each other in a touching way, whereby the serious feeling of transience is beautifully lost in the feeling of victorious life. This fortunate mixture pours out a deep, elegiac

tone through-out the entire landscape, which keeps the sensitive observer oscillating between rest and movement, reflection and enjoyment, and continues to resonate long after everything has disappeared.

The author assumes that only someone who has seen [this garden] in full summer can judge the entire value of this place. We would also like to add that only those who approach it in a certain way can fully appreciate its beauty. To fully enjoy it, one must be brought to it through the newly built princely castle. The route from Stuttgart to Hohenheim is, so to speak, a sensual history of garden art that offers interesting observations to the attentive traveler. In the orchards, vineyards, and farms along which the country roads run, the first physical beginnings of garden art appear stripped of all aesthetic decoration. But now French garden art welcomes the observer with proud gravity under the long and rugged poplar walls, which connect the open landscape with Hohenheim by arousing anticipation in their artistic form. This solemn impression increases to an almost embarrassing tension as one wanders through the chambers of the ducal palace, which has few equals in splendor and elegance and combines taste with extravagance in a certain rare way. Through the splendor that strikes the eye from all sides and through the artistic architecture of the rooms and furnishings, the need for simplicity is carried to the highest degree and the most solemn triumph is prepared for the rural nature that suddenly immerses the traveler in the so-called English village. Meanwhile, the monuments of sunken splendor—against whose mournful walls the planter leans his peaceful hut—render a peculiar effect on the heart. With secret joy, we see ourselves avenged in these crumbling ruins on the art which, in the magnificent building next door, had exercised its power to the point of abuse. But the nature that we find in this English garden is not the one that we had expected. It is a nature animated with spirit and exalted by art, which not only satisfies the simple man, but also the man who has been spoiled by culture and, by stimulating the former to think, leads the latter back to feeling.

Whatever one might object to such an interpretation of the Hohenheim grounds, the founder of these works deserves thanks for not having done anything to undermine them. And one would have to be very dissatisfied if one were not just as inclined to accept the deed for the will in aesthetic matters as in moral matters the will is the deed. When the painting of this Hohenheim complex is finally complete, the informed reader will be interested to see in it a symbolic character portrait of its remarkable creator, [a man] who knew how to force waterworks from nature in his gardens where hardly any spring could be found.

Every reader of taste who has seen these gardens in person will agree with the author's judgment regarding the gardens at Schwetzingen and the Seifersdorf Valley near Dresden. They will not be able to refrain from declaring that a sensibility that hangs tablets of written moral sayings on trees is an affectation, and any taste that randomly mixes mosques and Greek temples together is barbaric.