Gardening the Planet: Literature and the Reimagining of Human/Nature Relations for the Anthropocene

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Abstract

Gardening as an activity characterised by attentiveness to nature and willingness to adapt to and care for it, and the idea of gardening the planet have attracted recent interest in the context of debates on the Anthropocene. Following an introduction which explains how the Anthropocene challenges the traditional binary division between nature and culture, this article sketches an overview of historical conceptions of the 'natural' garden which anticipated aspects of contemporary thinking on *homo hortensis* (Astrid Schwarz), i.e. humanity as an integral part of nature, dwelling actively in it and enhancing it rather than consuming or destroying it. The second, longer part of the article argues that garden literature, initially in the form of prose fiction, and latterly in that of autobiographically framed essays describing the author's experiences in garden-making and reflecting on their wider implications, have contributed to the reimagining of human/nature relations which the Anthropocene demands. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie or the New Heloise* (1761) is examined as Early Anthropocene novel which anticipated aspects of Anthropocene thinking which find more explicit formulation in Michael Pollan's work of nonfiction garden writing, *Second Nature* (1991).

Keywords: human/nature relations, the Anthropocene, garden literature, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Michael Pollan.

Resumen

La jardinería, como actividad caracterizada por la atención a la naturaleza y la voluntad de adaptarse a ella y cuidarla, y la idea de cultivar un jardín para el planeta han suscitado recientemente un creciente interés en el contexto de los debates sobre el Antropoceno. Tras una introducción en la que se explica cómo el Antropoceno desafía la concepción tradicional de una división binaria entre naturaleza y cultura, este artículo comienza con una visión general de las concepciones históricas del jardín "natural" que anticipan aspectos del pensamiento contemporáneo sobre el *homo hortensis* (Astrid Schwarz), es decir, la humanidad como parte integrante de la naturaleza, que habita activamente en ella y la mejora en lugar de consumirla o destruirla. En la segunda parte del artículo se argumenta que la literatura sobre jardines, inicialmente en forma de prosa de ficción y, más tarde, en forma de ensayo autobiográfico en el que se describen las experiencias del autor en la creación de jardines, reflexionando sobre las implicaciones más amplias de la creación de jardines, ha contribuido a la reimaginación de las relaciones entre el ser humano y la naturaleza que exige el Antropoceno. *Julie o la nueva Heloísa* (1761), de Jean-Jacques Rousseau se examina como novela del Antropoceno temprano que anticipa aspectos del pensamiento antropocénico que encuentran una formulación más explícita en la obra de no ficción sobre jardinería de Michael Pollan, *Segunda naturaleza* (1991).

Palabras clave: la literatura de jardinería, relaciones humano/naturaleza, Antropoceno, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Michael Pollan.

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The Anthropocene has become a familiar concept in humanities research over the last fifteen years. Proposed by the Dutch meteorologist and atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and the American limnologist Eugene Stoermer in 2000 as the scientific name for the most recent period in Earth's history, in which human activities have impacted on the environment enough to constitute a distinct geological change, it has come to stand for the story of humans' changing relationship with the natural world.[1] More precisely, Anthropocene discourse consists of a bundle of competing stories of how we became geophysical agents capable of raising global temperatures, changing the very physical makeup of the planet and causing the sixth mass extinction of species, and of how this development will play out in the lives of future generations. Anthropocene scholarship in the natural sciences has been primarily concerned with defining the characteristics of the new age and deciding when it began. Crutzen and Stoermer initially conceived it as the age of fossil fuels, use of fertilisers in agriculture, and the rise of capitalism and globalisation, which began with the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century (17). The dawning of the nuclear age after the Second World War, when atom bombs and tests were followed by a spike in nuclear fallout and the Great Acceleration of global economic activity led to a significant increase of CO_2 emissions, has since become the preferred start date, but the beginning of agriculture and human settlement at the end of the last Ice Age, when human activities first altered the climate on a local scale has also been considered, and the geological marker defining the epoch remains to be agreed, and a minority of scientists have argued for multiple beginnings rather than a single moment of origin.[2] For all these dates, the Anthropocene is defined by a rise in the dominance of human species on Earth in terms of population growth, land use and consumption, accompanied by biodiversity loss, an increase in carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere, and global warming. This has given rise to a body of research into Early Anthropocene discourse in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as studies of twentieth and twenty-first-century writing.

Anthropocene debates have prompted humanities scholars such as Dipesh Chakrabarty and Donna Haraway to submit to critical scrutiny the human/nonhuman binary which is central to dominant western attitudes, and rethink the divisions between human and natural histories. Humans are increasingly regarded as an integral part of ecosystems, acting on them, but simultaneously being acted upon by nonhuman agents. In a time when nature untouched by human hand has almost ceased to exist, wilderness preservation, which was a key goal of the environmental movement in the 1970s and 1980s, has gradually been superseded by a paradigm of managed nature. The different understandings of how much and what kind of human intervention in the natural environment this should entail have given rise to heated debates,[3] but in this context the notion of gardening the planet has attracted growing interest.

[1] See in particular Dipesh Chakrabarty's influential article, 'The Climate of History: Four Theses."
[2] See Subramanian, "Anthropocene now: influential panel votes to recognize Earth's new epoch."
[3] See for instance Reynolds, "Earth system interventions as technologies of the Anthropocene."

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Humanities work on the Anthropocene has been largely conducted through examination of philosophical, political and scientific writing,[4] but it has also taken place in critical analyses of literary texts and artistic works which give insight into understandings of our relationship with nature. In the first part of this essay, I sketch an overview of historical conceptions of the 'natural' garden which anticipated key aspects of contemporary thinking on humanity as an integral part of nature, dwelling actively in it and enhancing it rather than consuming or destroying it. The second, longer part of the essay argues that writing on gardens, initially in the form of prose fiction, and later in that of autobiographically framed essays describing the author's experiences in garden-making and reflecting on their wider implications, have participated in and contributed to the reimagining of human/nature relations which the Anthropocene demands. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie or the New Heloise* (1761) is examined as an Early Anthropocene novel which anticipated through its depiction of Julie's garden Michael Pollan's thinking on gardening as the quest for a sustainable form of interaction with the natural environment which, while meeting genuine human needs, makes a positive contribution to the biosphere rather than merely consuming it, in his work of nonfiction garden writing, *Second Nature* (1991).[5]

Conceptions of the 'Natural' Garden and Gardening in the Anthropocene

Gardening, or rather, a particular kind of gardening characterised by attentiveness to nature, willingness to adapt to it and care for it, conducted in a spirit of co-production rather than imposition of human will, has become a model for the relationship with global nature which we should work toward if humanity is to survive in the Anthropocene. There are widely differing conceptions of gardening in the Anthropocene, but before outlining some of the principal ones it is worth noting that they were prefigured by notions of the 'natural' garden. Elements of the natural garden were already present in the principles underlying the eighteenth-century English landscape garden, others came to the fore in the fashion for 'wild' gardens toward the end of the nineteenth century, the early twentieth-century German 'nature garden,' and in the 'Le Roy Garden' in the 1970s and 1980s.[6] There is of course also a link with understandings and representations of that most primal of gardens, the Garden of Eden.

The English landscape garden style which emerged in the early eighteenth century and spread across Europe, succeeding the more formal, symmetrical 'French' garden, aimed to create an appearance of naturalness, by replacing the elaborate geometrically-

[4] See for instance Bonneuil and Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*.

[5] I thank *Ecozon@*'s two anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful suggestions for improvements to an earlier version of this article.

[6] 'Natural garden' is the term used by Peter Harper in a pioneering working manual of natural gardening methods (Peter Harper, Chris Madsen and Jeremy Light. *The Natural Garden Book: Gardening in Harmony with Nature*. Gaia Books, 1994) and by the prominent garden designers and theorists Piet Oudolf, Henk Gerritsen and Noel Kingsbury. It is also the label used by the garden historian Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, whose edited book *Nature and Ideology: Natural Garden Design in the Twentieth Century* (Dumbarton Oaks, 1997) provides a useful historical overview.

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patterned flowerbeds in Baroque gardens with less formal planting in flowing shapes, clumps of shrubs and trees, and serpentine bodies of water. Hahas (dry-ditch-and-wall combinations creating a barrier to keep animals out while preserving an uninterrupted view of the land beyond) gave the impression that the garden was one with the wider pastoral landscape. The designers of classical landscape, picturesque and Gothic gardens arranged nature into 'scenes' to be viewed and interpreted from specific vantage points , through conscious composition of hills, trees, rocks and waterfalls. However, this was still understood as working *with* rather than *against* nature. At the same time, the landscape garden was theorised as a space in which the individual could experience freedom, and associated with a liberal and egalitarian political agenda.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the vogue for naturalness returned in the forms of the 'wild' and 'cottage' garden, which were popularised by William Robinson in his books, *The Wild Garden* (1870) and *The English Flower Garden* (1883), and the Arts and Crafts garden (characterised by the movement's preference for simplicity and the vernacular), of which Gertrude Jekyll was the most celebrated proponent. With their revival of old-fashioned native perennials such as snowdrops, wild roses, foxgloves and columbines, staggered arrangement of hardy plants in herbaceous borders, integration of fruit bushes and vegetable beds, and climbing roses in trees and wildflower meadows, trendsetting gardeners sought to recreate a countryside which was imagined to be pure, stable and moral, as a recuperative sanctuary from the perceived ills of urban society.

In the years before the First World War this naturalistic English garden style was taken up and developed further in Germany by Willy Lange, Professor of Garden Design in Berlin. In Lange's 'Naturgarten,' a proto-ecological desire to preserve endangered species converged with Goethean pantheism and a wish to celebrate German cultural identity. The ideas of Robinson and Lange were taken up in America by champions of the 'prairie garden,' who worked to preserve endangered native plants and restore a vanishing American landscape. The promotion of native landscapes which the Danish-American landscape architect Jens Jensen advocated was, like that of Lange, ideologically problematic, because of its association with racially defined nationalism. However, Jensen's use of native grasses and wildflowers from the rapidly vanishing prairies, assembled in naturalistic settings, led to restoration projects across the United States which served to conserve biodiversity and benefited wildlife.

One of the most radical departures in garden design in the second half of the twentieth century was the work of the Dutchman Louis Le Roy. Le Roy conceived his public parks and gardens as responses to the impoverishment of modern urban life as well as environmental degradation. He gave the community a central role in planning, while permitting plants and trees to grow freely. The Le Roy Garden anticipated Anthropocene gardening by aiming to provide spaces where vegetation could develop to maturity and humans could meet their genuine needs, through mutual participation of humans, plants and animals. Although this kind of garden was too unkempt and jungle-

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like to please the general public, Le Roy's ideas inspired a generation of community garden projects in the Netherlands and Germany.[7]

Today, responsible stewardship of nature, maintenance of natural fertility and the provision of habitats for wildlife are widely accepted as key factors of the gardening ethic. In the Anthropocene, culture can no longer be pitted against nature, but must work with it. Certainly, we need wild places as refuges for our nonhuman fellow creatures, and perhaps also to enable encounters with phenomena which remind us that there are limits to our control of the planet. However, experiencing wildness is not the only way of decentring the human. Thinkers in disciplines from Landscape Architecture to Geography, Anthropology and Philosophy have reflected on the features that distinguish what Astrid Schwarz has called *Homo hortensis* from the more familiar *Homo faber*.[8] *Homo faber* is modern man, the fabricator who creates tools to act in the world. Ingenuity and productivity are his core values. In contrast, *Homo hortensis* signifies a humankind in the garden—working in it, deriving pleasure from it, and leading a life guided by the principles of gardening.

Approaches to gardening have always varied enormously, ranging from following the principle of command and control and imposing rigid human order on nature at one extreme, to allowing nature maximum freedom to develop and change at the other, merely nudging it gently into a more pleasing or productive form. Different theories of gardening in and for the Anthropocene have similarly been expounded.

Hydroponics and hydroculture are practical examples of the techno-scientific approach to Anthropocene gardening, but equally large-scale flagship initiatives such as the Eden Project in Cornwall and the 'Gardens by the Bay' in Singapore. The Eden Project, which opened in 2000, is, with its enormous geodesic domes, recycling of water and renewable energy, as much an engineering achievement as a garden. Even more so the Singaporian Gardens by the Bay, whose Supertree Grove consists of tree-like structures between 25 and 50 metres tall. Home to enclaves of ferns, vines, orchids and bromeliads, these collect rainwater for use in irrigation and fountain displays, and are fitted with photovoltaic cells that harness solar energy which is used for lighting.

In this high-tech understanding, gardening in the Anthropocene is essentially a matter of adapting to climate change and using technology to mitigate it. However, garden theorists and landscape architects tend to favour a gentler approach which is more accommodating to existing natural ecosystems and processes and less interventionist. Conservation plays a role in it, but the aim is less to restore nature to a supposedly original state than to maintain and improve its resilience.

The Australian ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood has written about gardening in this vein as a practice of interaction with nature characterised by intimacy with and care for places, and partnership with nonhumans as well as other humans. European settlers in Australia introduced plants from home and sought to recreate an aesthetic familiar to them. Since the 1970s, there has, however, been a reaction against

[7] See Boukema and McIntyre, editors. *Louis G. Le Roy*.
[8] See Schwarz, "From *Homo faber* to *Homo hortensis*. Gardening techniques in the Anthropocene."

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this, calling for the exclusive use of native plants. Plumwood rejects this purist approach, and argues for what she calls an 'adaptive' garden. "In place of an aesthetic of national or local purity, I suggest, we need a critical, ecological, interspecies and place-sensitive ethics of gardening as our guide," she writes (par. 13).

The principles of sensitivity towards nature and negotiation between natural systems and human needs which are at the heart of Plumwood's conception of the 'adaptive' garden, and central to gardening in the Anthropocene, are also present in the thinking of the French landscape architect and garden theorist Gilles Clément. Clément is a leading advocate of the notion that gardens should be permitted to change over time. With the *Garden in Movement*, located in central France, Clément abandoned the attempt to maintain a fixed design. Recognising that plants are "vagabond," he accepted "seeing them escape or establish themselves: invade the ground, mark the landscape to the extent of giving it their signature. Giving it a supplementary identity" (Clément 162). Willingness to accept this tempering of human choice with chance as a matter of playful design rather than entropic disorder is a key principle of the Garden in Movement. Clément also popularised the phrase "planetary gardening" (132). We should think of the entire planet as a garden, he argues, and of ourselves as its keepers, responsible for care of the totality of life, including animals as well as plants. His "humanist" ecology proposes a relationship between humans and nature in which the gardener "acts locally on behalf of and in awareness of the planet" (64). Clément's idea of gardening the planet was taken up by the popular American environmental nonfiction writer and climate justice activist Emma Marris in her book *The Rambunctious Garden. Saving Nature in a Post-Wild World* (2011). "We are already running the whole earth, whether we admit it or not," Marris writes:

> To run it consciously and effectively, we must admit our role and even embrace it. We must temper our romantic notion of untrammelled wilderness and find room next to it for the more nuanced notion of a global, half-wild rambunctious garden, tended by us. [....] Rambunctious gardening is proactive and optimistic; it creates more and more nature as it goes, rather than just building walls around the nature we have left. (2-3)

I have presented these examples from the history of garden design and the writing of philosophers, landscape architects and environmentalists to show how the integration of human individuals and collectives in the wider community of plants and animals and other principles of Anthropocene gardening such as tolerance of a degree of disorder, the embedding of the garden in the landscape, the inclusion of fruit trees and vegetable plots throughout ornamental gardens, low maintenance planting with perennials and accommodation to local conditions and naturally occurring plant communities have been anticipated in earlier centuries in gardening theory and practice, while others again such as concern for biodiversity and the preservation of heritage varieties, readiness to adapt to natural change and community-oriented gardening have been developed more recently in response to recognition of the global scale of human impact on the environment. In the following I explore the contribution which the literature of gardening has made to this re-imagining of human/nature relations for the Anthropocene, again asking to what extent older texts have anticipated recent Anthopocene thinking. First, I ask what forms it has

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taken, and how it has come to serve as a medium for reflecting on the human/nature relationship.

Garden Fiction and Garden Writing

Garden literature is no neatly defined genre, but a thematic category of writing in forms ranging from practical guides on garden design and maintenance to poetry, novels and essays. Illustrated descriptions of gardens and plants, and advice on their planting, care and uses make up the bulk of publications on gardens and gardening. However, gardens and plants have aways also featured in texts with literary ambition. Poems in the English language include classics such as Andrew Marvell's 'The Garden' and his less well known 'Mower' poems (1681) and Erasmus Darwin's long poem, *The Botanic Garden* (1791), which was a pioneering work of popular science. Narrative prose in which gardens are more than mere settings for the plot to play out in range from children's books such as Frances Hodgson Burnett's classic, *The Secret Garden* (1911) and Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958) to the Modernist novels of Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence, the science fiction narratives of Ursula LeGuin, Kim Stanley Robinson and Margaret Atwood, and contemporary works of social realism including Richard Powers's *Gain* (1998) and Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001).[9]

In the late nineteenth century, a new genre emerged which was midway between purely instructional writing on gardening and these works of literature, consisting of autobiographical accounts of garden-making, garden travelogues and histories of gardens and plantsmen. In the best examples of this body of essayistic nonfiction, for which Jennifer Atkinson, author of a thoughtful and wide-ranging study of American garden literature since the nineteenth century, reserves the term 'garden writing' (3-4),[10] horticultural expertise, rich descriptions of plants and excursions into their cultural history are combined with breadth of general knowledge, innovative thinking and stylistic eloquence.[11] American and British garden writers from Charles Dudley Warner and Gertrude Jekyll to Michael Pollan and Ambra Edwards are enthusiasts, who convey information in informal and engaging literary prose, celebrate with playful irony their mistakes and failures in the face of an indifferent nature, and take issue with fashionable gardening practices. They also philosophise: today, accounts of gardening practice often serve as vehicles for reflection on the place of humans in the world and our ethical responsibilities toward nonhumans, and descriptions of garden design can be a medium for working out new forms of human habitation. It might seem quaint to imagine that everyday gardening practices or literature hold any useful responses or solutions in a time of climate change, ocean acidification, soil loss, water depletion, superstorms and drought, chemical pollution and biodiversity loss, Atkinson reflects in her Epilogue. And

[9] See Atkinson, Chapter 4 on gardening in science fiction, and pp. 7-8 and 209-210 on Powers's novel; Emmett, pp. 147-152 on *The Corrections*.

[10] Her choice of the term is presumably motivated by the analogy with 'nature writing.' In both cases, a degree of literary ambition is present, and both combine observation of nature with attention to the subject and their relationship with nature.

[11] See also Rogers's Introduction in *Writing the Garden*.

yet, "perhaps this genre's reflections have more relevance today than ever, providing insights that uniquely speak to our present moment in the Anthropocene" (201). The second part of this article seeks to support this claim by examining two texts which depict garden-making as a model for interaction with nature in general and reflect on human/ nature relations.

Contemporary art and fiction have been the principal focus of research into culture in and for the Anthropocene,[12] but there has been a recent outpouring of scholarship on the emergence of Anthropocenic awareness in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writing.[13] This Early Anthropocene literature registered local environmental destruction, envisaged its globalised consequences, and imagined alternative human/nature relations. Anthropocene debates have prompted new approaches to nineteenth-century canonical works by Mary Shelley, Blake, Byron, Wordsworth, Thoreau, Dickens and Tennyson, the paintings of Constable and Turner, Modernist writing by T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf and the science fiction of H.G. Wells and J.G. Ballard. Since the middle of the eighteenth century, literature and art have served as media for the expression of anxieties about the future consequences of pollution, resource depletion and the extinction of species, and for soul-searching about the place of humans in the world. In this body of work, gardening and garden-making already appeared as a counter model to the exploitative and unsustainable treatment of natural resources which was coming to characterise modernity.

The American Professor of Philosophy Zev Trachtenberg, a specialist in conceptualising and evaluating human transformations of the physical environment, proposed in 2018 in a posting to his blog 'Inhabiting the Anthropocene' that past theorists may have developed "concepts whose application to our situation we are [only] now able to perceive" (no pagination). Historical figures in the western tradition of political philosophy such as Rousseau can, he argues, shed light on radically contemporary phenomena like the Anthropocene, because they have already experienced the complexity and the ambivalences in our interaction with nature, and written works that can help us articulate them. Rousseau's description of the Elysium garden in *Julie or the New Heloise* (1761) is in Trachtenberg's view "a crucial text" in this respect. However, he does not expand on this further. In the following, I examine *Julie* as an example of Early Anthropocene garden literature. I argue that while the function of the eponymous Julie's garden within the plot is to compensate for its creator's unhappy love life, it simultaneously models a way of interacting with nature that differs from that being practised increasingly at the time, one which anticipates tenets of Anthropocene thinking

[12] See for instance Timothy Clark. *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Project*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2015; Adam Trexler. *Anthropocene Fictions. The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*. University of Virginia Press, 2015; David Farrier. *Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones, and Extinction*. University of Minnesota Press, 2019; Pieter Vermeulen. *Literature and the Anthropocene*. Routledge, 2020.

[13] See David Higgins. *British Romanticism, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene: Writing Tambora*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017; Seth T. Reno. *Early Anthropocene Literature in Britain, 1750-1884*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020; Kate Rigby. *Reclaiming Romanticism: Towards an Ecopoetics of Decolonization*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.

which are formulated more explicitly in Michael Pollan's bestselling philosophical garden memoir, *Second Nature* (1991).

Rousseau's *Julie or the New Heloise*

Rousseau was one of the most important thinkers about the relationship between man and nature in the eighteenth century, and how this relationship had deteriorated and might be improved. He would seem at first glance an unlikely authority for thinking about the Anthropocene: he wrote that everything was good as nature made it, and only corrupted by man and society, arguing in his first Discourse, the *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (1751), that the legitimisation of luxury and leisure by the arts and sciences had resulted in the moral degradation of mankind. He would also seem an unlikely advocate of gardens or gardening: one would expect pleasure gardens (as works of art and objects of luxury) to be subject to his condemnation. In his second, more celebrated Discourse, the *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1755), he took fundamental issue with human civilisation: accompanied as it has been by the rise of private property, social inequality and the exploitation of humans and the natural world by those who possess wealth and power, it meant departure from the natural world and the state of nature. Humans, who were once carefree and independent hunters, became slaves to domesticity by adopting agriculture. Viewed from this perspective, cultivation is inferior to wildness. We might therefore also expect Rousseau to reject gardening, as an activity which binds individuals to social convention and repetition, and deprives them of their freedom.

There is, however, evidence that Rousseau was interested in both gardens and gardening, and this aspect of his thinking has attracted recent attention from philosophers, cultural historians and literary critics. As Jérôme Brillaud has pointed out, he depicted a series of gardens in his novel-cum-philosophical treatise, *Emile, or On Education*, as well as in the epistolary novel, *Julie*. In *Emile*, gardens are used as settings for lessons on private property, luxury, space, education and theatre.[14] Rousseau presents gardening as a benign form of temporary land appropriation contrasting with territorial conquest (*Emile* 232), and at the end of the book he praises simplicity and avoidance of ostentation in garden design, and advocates integrating vegetable beds and fruit trees in the ornamental garden (525, 604). However, it is in Julie's garden that Rousseau's conception of a union of nature and culture through non-exploitative human interaction with the forces of nature finds its clearest and most extensive expression.

The garden is described by St. Preux in a letter to his English friend and mentor, Milord Edward Bomston (Part 4, Letter 11—*Julie* 386–401). Over a period of eight years, Julie has transformed a once dry and unproductive orchard into a lush verdant space which affords shade in the heat of summer. Rivulets are criss-crossed by winding paths. Grassy glades are interspersed with banks of wild flowers, fragrant herbs and garden flowers. Fruit bushes grow between clumps of lilac, hazel, elder, mock orange and broom.

[14] Brillaud, "Beans and Melons: Rousseau's Vegetable Garden," pp. 4–6 and 7–14.

Vines, clematis, honeysuckle, hops and bryony create a canopy between the trees like in a tropical jungle, and ground cover gives the place the appearance of being untouched.

Julie began creating her garden when she was mourning her mother's death: she sought solitude here, and found comfort. More importantly, it has also, we later discover, distracted from and compensated for the lingering pain she suffers because she was forced by her parents to renounce her teenage love for St. Preux. The title of Rousseau's novel invites interpretation of it as a retelling of the tragic love story of the twelfth-century thinker Abelard and his gifted pupil, Heloïse. Heloïse had a child, and the couple married secretly. However, her guardian had Abelard castrated in an act of vengeance. They separated at Abelard's insistence, and both joined religious orders. After many years, Abelard wrote an account of their sufferings, and an exchange of letters followed, in which Heloïse in particular poured out her frustrated longing and passion. Their story attracted countless readers and inspired many adaptations after the Latin manuscript was printed in the early seventeenth century, translated into French in 1687, and popularized in the English-speaking world by Alexander Pope's verse epistle, *Eloisa to Abelard*, in 1717.) Heloise served as a model for feminine passion in particular, and its attempted sublimation or transcendence.

Renunciation of a youthful passion which was pure, but socially unacceptable because of the difference in standing between the tutor and his socially superior pupil, or rather the attempt to transform their relationship into one of platonic serenity, after years of separation, is the central theme of Rousseau's novel. After their enforced separation, Julie and St. Preux devote their lives to higher things. Julie's father has promised her to a fellow nobleman named Wolmar, and as a dutiful daughter, she marries Wolmar. St. Preux goes off on a voyage around the world, and Julie succeeds in forgetting her feelings for him. She finds happiness as wife and mother, and in managing the household. When St. Preux returns from his travels six years later, he is engaged as tutor to the Wolmar children. All live together in harmony, and there are only faint echoes of the old affair between St. Preux and Julie. Julie practices gardening as a form of therapy: her garden becomes a place of moral improvement, where illicit passion is replaced by virtue. For her erstwhile lover too, it possesses a therapeutic function: to St. Preux, it seems a refuge where the sweet sight of nature alone would banish from his memory all the "social and factitious order" that made him so unhappy (399).

St. Preux contrasts Julie's garden with the oppressive and sterile symmetry of the formal gardens in Versailles, but equally with the elaborate, high-maintenance artifice of the great Chinese gardens, and the carefully constructed vistas and grand follies of English landscape gardens such as Stowe. Rousseau's description of the garden is credited with having played an important role in promoting the fashion for picturesque, or sentimental landscape gardens in eighteenth-century France. However, whereas these gardens (like the English ones they were modelled on) typically included temples and monuments bearing inscriptions for meditation, such openly artificial features are conspicuously absent from it. It is instead focused almost entirely on the illusion of naturalness. Embracing wildness and disorder, the garden has been fashioned to imitate the irregularity, simplicity and self-sufficiency of the forests in the surrounding mountains.

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The garden blends into the countryside: the walls which enclose two of its sides are masked by bushes which make them look like the outer edge of a wood. The other two sides are formed by hedges of maple, hawthorn, holly and privet. Julie and her husband have arranged a setting in which natural processes may play out on their own, rather than being forced into patterns dictated by fashion or the desire to impress others. (Ornamental gardens commonly served to represent the social status of their owners.) The ground has not been levelled, and nothing is planted in straight lines. Working largely with common grasses and shrubs, the garden requires a minimum of maintenance. All traces of the cultivation and upkeep needed are erased: grass is sown where the ground has been dug up.

Struck by the dense foliage, the abundance of flowers, and the absence of signs of human order, St. Preux initially believes he is transported to a South Sea natural paradise. But Julie corrects him, saying: "It is true […] that nature did it all, but under my direction, and there is nothing here that I have not designed." (388) She explains how she has accomplished the effect of complete naturalness by diverting the water from the runoff of an ornamental fountain in the garden above, and using only native plants, "arranged and combined in a manner that yielded a cheerier and pleasanter effect" (ibid.). She has, however, planted and cultivated roses, raspberries, currants, lilac bushes, wild grapes, jasmine, and hazel trees. The garden which Rousseau describes in *Julie* is a utopian model of harmonious fusion of nature and culture, a co-creation of humans with nature, in which plants are given freedom to grow naturally and our non-human fellow creatures are welcome.

The garden is thronged with birds, which are attracted by daily feeding, a pond surrounded by reeds where they can drink and bathe undisturbed, and the shade and security from predators which the garden affords. Julie has had two clearings sown with "a random mixture of grasses, straw, and all sorts of plants," creating a wildflower meadow with wheat, millet, sunflowers, hemp and vetch—"generally all the seeds birds like" (391). In spring, little piles of horsehair, straw, wool, moss, and other materials suitable for nestbuilding are provided. The enemies of birds (mice, owls and "especially children," we are told in a note!) are kept away, and "the perpetual peace they enjoy induces them to nest in a convenient place" (392). Access is strictly limited to Monsieur and Madame de Wolmar, her father, the children's governess, and very occasionally, the children—under strict supervision.) When St. Preux comments approvingly that the birds are guests rather than prisoners in an aviary, Julie counters that it is humans who are the guests here: the birds are the masters. She pays them tribute so they will put up with her occasional presence (391). Humans are then not merely not treated as superior beings: they are not even regarded as the equals of other species.

Julie's garden is then an exercise in Early Anthropocene imagination of alternative human/nature relations, possessing positive features which anticipate the sort of interaction with nature demanded of us today: it is low-maintenance, but renders nature fertile by means of skilful irrigation, manuring and planting; it respects regional differences by being composed largely of native plants; and it provides a habitat for wildlife. At the same time, it does not altogether neglect food production. The fruits which

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are harvested here may appear "unhandsome," for they do not grow in an orchard planted and maintained in such a way as to maximise the yield, but they are nevertheless "excellent" and bring "pleasure," for they are the product of thoughtfully cultivated land (389).[15]

In a conference paper posted online in 2019, Mark Cladis argues that the Wolmars' estate of Clarens and Julie's garden in it offer "a rich, detailed way of life" that provides imaginative resources for combating climate change (1). Rousseau's description of Clarens begins in Part 4, Letter 10, and takes up much of Part 5. Clarens is modest in size compared with Julie's ancestral home, the grand and magnificent Chateau d'Etange. It is in effect a large farm, with dairy, vineyards, orchards and a vegetable garden. Clarens is a model of rural simplicity, frugality and good husbandry. Peace and innocence reign in the well-regulated household. As St. Preux notes, Wolmar and his wife have transformed the grounds to accommodate what might be described as an Anthropocene aesthetic finding beauty in what is useful: "The vegetable garden was too small for the kitchen; the flower bed has been turned into a second one, but so elegant and so well designed that this bed thus designed is more pleasing to the eye than before." "Everywhere they have replaced attractive things with useful things, and attractiveness has almost always come out the better." (364) "Clarens is one of the first eco-visions that exemplifies a sustainable, interdependent relation between humans and their non-human environment", Cladis concludes (10). What he calls "Julie's Alpine eco-community" serves "as a striking alternative to the rapacious economic, social, and political orders of the day," palpably illustrating Rousseau's hope that "we can live peaceably and justly with fellow humans and the natural world that sustains us" (13). Rousseau was, Cladis argues, one of the first modern Europeans to begin the work of dismantling the nature/ culture binary in this way (2).

It is, however, important to recognize the doubts about the efficacy of Julie's garden that Rousseau builds into his narrative. We have seen how Julie's wealth and social standing forbade her marriage to St. Preux, and how she sought to transcend her passion by creating her garden. Her success is, however, hard-won and precarious. The very name she gives the garden, 'Elysium,' betrays a certain ambivalence: this is a paradise, but one which may only be reached after a kind of death. She has created it not least because she does not dare revisit the bower on the other side of the house where she and St. Preux exchanged their first kiss. Julie's deathbed confession of the anguish caused by her determination not to commit adultery, and of her constant fear of letting down her guard and entering into an illicit affair with St. Preux, exposes the hollowness of her husband's hope that she and St. Preux can be no more than friends. Julie dies from a fever brought on by nearly drowning in the effort to rescue her son, when he falls into the lake. But there is a hint that she views her death as a release from intolerable tension. It is akin to a desperate act of suicide. Rousseau therefore combines overt didactic aims with a more ambiguous advocacy of freedom to love. The crux of the plot is less the transmutation of

[15] For a reading of the Austrian novelist, Adalbert Stifter's *Indian Summer* (1857-9) as a comparably oriented work of Early Anthropocene garden literature, see my article "Gardening as an Ecological and Educational Project: Stifter's Anticipation of Anthropocene Thinking and Aesthetics in *Der Nachsommer*."

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love into friendship, of passion into respect and admiration than the question whether this can be achieved. This ending can be read as casting doubt on the ability of gardening to compensate for suffering from social ills.

We have seen how garden-making is depicted as a form of self-refinement in Rousseau's novel. Working in the garden also plays a part in Julie's plan for the education of her children: helping with gardening tasks is a meaningful occupation which furthers their health (478) and fortifies their character (398). The notion that gardening has a role to play in moral education links *Julie* with one of the best-known works of modern garden writing, Michael Pollan's *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education*.

Pollan's *Second Nature*

Written over thirty years ago, *Second Nature* predates the Anthropocene concept. However, Pollan's depiction of cultivation as inseparable from self-cultivation is particularly apposite in our time. A collection of essays framed by autobiographical narrative and arranged by the seasons, the book combines horticultural information with reflection on ethical and ontological questions about humans and nature, and their social and political implications. The author, professor of journalism and gardener, Pollan uses the story of how he created a five-acre garden out of an abandoned farmstead in New England to draw out the ethical principles inherent in the horticultural lessons he learnt from gardening. He argues that gardening can and should be an exercise in human co-existence with nature, rooted in an ethic of partnership and care, leading to individual wellbeing while increasing the diversity and abundance of life. This kind of gardening is a paradigm for *acting* in nature, as opposed to simply *being* there (3). Americans have a deeply ingrained habit of seeing nature and culture as irreconcilably opposed, he writes (4). This choice is a false one: we need, now more than ever, to learn how to use nature without damaging it. For Pollan, the idea that the garden is a place where nature and culture can be wedded in a way that can benefit both is more important for us today than the cult of wilderness (5). Pollan acknowledges the farmer and poet Wendell Berry, the garden writer Eleanor Perényi, the philosopher of contingency, Richard Rorty, and the critical historian of the notion of wilderness, William Cronon as key influences on his thinking, describing them as "pioneers on the frontier of nature and culture" (6).

He starts by explaining that the most troubling difficulty he encountered in creating his garden was the unexamined attitudes towards nature which he had brought with him. He began gardening from the position of Thoreau and Emerson, who celebrated wilderness and saw weeds as defects of human perception. But he soon realised that as a gardener he must learn how to reconcile letting nature be with meeting his own human needs: he must organise his vegetable beds in such a way that it was possible to keep them free of weeds, build fences to keep out the marauding woodchucks and deer, and make active use of all environmentally acceptable means of pest control.

An ethic based on the garden would accept that the local environment is not always hospitable, and must often be substantially altered in order to admit human habitation and food production. It would be frankly anthropocentric, because nature is indifferent to

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our wellbeing, but it would recognise that humans are dependent on many other forms of life, and we must take their interests into account. A losing battle brings him to gradually replace delicate flowers such as delphiniums, campanula and lady's mantle by tougher species including day lilies, evening primrose, rudbeckia and even the common weed, purple loosestrife. And he learns to keep the losses to his vegetables incurred by slugs, larvae, beetles and aphids to an acceptable level with companion planting and ladybirds. Without either resorting to chemicals or trusting blindly in nature to be benign, he writes:

> I think I've drawn a workable border between me and the forest. It depends on me acting like a sane and civilised human, which is to say, a creature whose nature it is to remake his surroundings, and whose culture can guide him on questions of aesthetics and ethics. What I am making here is a middle ground between nature and culture, a place that is at once of nature and unapologetically set against it: what I'm making is a garden. (53)

In his central chapter, which is ironically entitled "Weeds are us," Pollan develops the argument that we have made so many changes in the land that some form of gardening has become unavoidable (113). Weeding, "the process by which we make informed choices in nature, discriminate between good and bad, apply our intelligence and sweat to the earth" (115), is the very essence of gardening: "My yard is not so different from the rest of the world. We cannot live in it without changing nature irrevocably; having done so, we're obliged to tend to the consequences of the changes we've wrought, which is to say, to weed." Culture as ethical choice and forbearance "offer[s] the planet its last best hope" (ibid.).

Pollan's conception of gardening as the creation of 'second nature,' which he encourages us to extend our interaction with nature *in toto*, thus envisages give and take in a mutual accommodation between humans and the natural world. However, there is no such thing as a harmonious compromise between the two, nor a stable solution: gardens require continual human intervention, and without this they will collapse (49). Gardening will always be hard work, and we are not free to do what we will with the natural environment. Indeed, it is precisely the partialness of our mastery over nature that gives gardening its savour, he argues (131). Knowing how tenuous our human control of nature is, it is time, Pollan writes, in terms comparable to Clément's,

> to acknowledge, perhaps even evoke, that tenuousness in the design of our gardens. By leaving some parts wild, and by making a virtue of their juxtapositions with more formal areas, we can introduce into our gardens a measure of doubt about our control of nature, and that might be a good thing to do. (255)

In *Julie*, the twists, turns and dramatic revelations of a complicated plot involve descriptions of sexual encounter, pregnancy, miscarriage, the violence and remorse of a wrathful father and male infidelity. Rousseau's eventful narrative and exploration of highly charged emotions could not be more different from Pollan's reflective autobiographical essays, with their ironic tone and lightness of touch. However, *Julie* and *Second Nature* share a common message, one of hope tinged with realistic doubt. In the novel, we have seen that the attempted transmuting of love into serene, platonic friendship in later life is fragile and ambiguous. The author's overt didactic aims conceal traces of advocacy of freedom to love, and this was presumably not the least of the book's

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attractions for his readers. Rousseau's imagined garden offers guidance and hope, but does not conceal the cost, and leaves open whether the aim can ultimately be achieved. The same could be said for Pollan's book, which seeks, without withholding the difficulties involved in gardening, to foster attentive observation, respect and responsibility for nature, and to inspire and guide readers by example. "Gardening […] is a painstaking exploration of place," he writes: "everything that happens in my garden—the thriving and dying of particular plants, the maraudings of various insects and other pests—teaches me to know this patch of land more intimately, its ecology and microclimate, the particular ecology of its local weeds and animals and insects." (62f.) Gardening "tutors us in nature's ways" and instructs us in how to lessen our dependence of distant sources of energy, technology, food and interest (64).

Rousseau and Pollan leave important questions relating to the Anthropocene unanswered. Where should the line be drawn between painful renunciation of inessential consumption in order to minimise our carbon emissions, and pursuing a strategy of risky high-tech intervention on a scale capable of altering conditions on the planet? What obstacles are there in the way of extending the gardening model outlined here, which relates to private gardens for which a single individual is responsible, to the planet as a whole, and how might they be overcome? As Robert Emmett writes in his history of American garden literature, *Cultivating Environmental Justice*, "significant practical challenges, and perhaps unintended conceptual problems are involved in materialising the planetary garden paradigm" (190). Noting that Rousseau's vision of gardening for the Anthropocene is situated in a context of a rigidly structured class society and depends on benevolent paternalism, the garden historian Susan Taylor-Leduc has argued that *Julie* had the effect of legitimising seigneurial rank and class divisions by giving them a new grounding ("Luxury in the Garden: *La Nouvelle Héloise* reconsidered"). And while Emmett acknowledges in his account of *Second Nature* the merits of Pollan's "timely and compelling" garden-centred ethic as "a way to address the epistemological problem of human perspective in ecological knowledge and the ethical problems of responsibility to biophysical and social others" (91), he is sharply critical of Pollan's advocacy of the idea of the garden as a model for decision-making about how to shape landscapes, asserting that Pollan's book is characterised by a "white male proprietary perspective" (87) and assumes a degree of affluence and privilege (187). Emmett therefore seeks additional impulses for gardening in the Anthropocene in chapters devoted to black women garden writers, and narratives of urban community gardening and guerrilla gardening.

Clearly, most people in the world lack the leisure and means to garden like Julie, or like Pollan, and a theory of the Earth as a planetary garden would have to recognise this. Rousseau and Pollan have participated in the renegotiation of the public understanding of the human/ nature relationship through their imagining of ways of humanising nature and bridging the nature/culture divide. Just as the ultimately tragic enforced relinquishment of love in Rousseau's novel challenged the subordination of private feelings to social and pecuniary family interests in his time, he challenged the use of gardens as displays of wealth and power, and the acquisitiveness associated with economic rationalism. His goal was to cultivate a taste for the alternative kind of culture

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that is exemplified in Julie's estate and particularly in her private garden. The gardener's attentiveness to nature can help us attune our desires and align our needs more closely with nature's ways, Pollan writes (195). Rousseau and Pollan have the power to inspire readers to look at how we might interact differently with nature on a planetary scale in the future.

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