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Review of *The London Town Garden 1700-1840*, by Todd Longstaffe-Gowan

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in this journal, March 1995), where the many activities and people involved in the process of feeding the king and his court came into focus. Bouchenot-Dechin notes that at that time there were no comparable publications on the histories of the people who served as gardeners to the kings or of their careers and their families despite the mass of material available in the archives. Thus, this book (and the projected series) offers a new, important perspective on a much studied subject.

Although the author includes the results of much new research, it must be noted that this is a book written primarily for nonspecialist readers with an interest in Versailles. The charming illustrations from contemporary drawings, paintings, and prints (used more often than not to decorate the pages as well as to supply information) have resulted in an unusually attractive volume. Yet specialists in garden history will also find their rewards. Bouchenot-Dechin gives a good picture of the development and the evolution of the Versailles gardens in the decades 1660–1700, and there is much interesting detail about gardening, a good deal of which is not widely known. I was especially taken by a description of the annual harvest of orange blossoms at the Versailles Orangerie, picked primarily to determine the eventual ornamental distribution of the fruits, but then used in a number of ways including the making of liqueurs. At times, the book goes too far in its attempt to be entertaining, such as in the lengthy chapter on Marly-le-Roy, presented by the author as a threat to those working at Versailles. This may have been the case, but surely a description of the way of life at Marly was not necessary in a life of Dupuis. The strategy of using contemporary quotes, as from Mme de Sévigné, is appropriate, but the frequent use of the duc de Saint-Simon—a very biased observer who disliked the Versailles gardens—raises questions of accuracy, and I was surprised to see a quote from Nicodemus Tessin about Mansart's Colonnade put into the mouth of Henry Dupuis him-

self. I also have some doubts about the quotes from Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville (*La théorie et pratique du jardinage*, 1709) used as if spoken by Dupuis, who left no writings (even though the source of the quotations is carefully indicated in the footnotes).

Finally, the serious research at the basis of this book should have been extended in one more direction. No drawing by Dupuis is reproduced, and thus an important aspect of his creative life is missing. An attempt to find some of the drawings made for Tessin in Stockholm would have been worthwhile. And, while the bibliography is obviously intended for a French-speaking public (only items written in French are included), it is not clear that the author has fully exploited the many important writings about Versailles in German and English.

Despite my reservations, this is a strong beginning for a series of studies that should move well beyond traditional limits. Moreover, it seems that the exploration of such nontraditional areas of research will play a major role in the program of the new international study center due to be established at Versailles in the next few years. The field awaits both the publications and the study center with anticipation.

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Todd Longstaffe-Gowan
**The London Town Garden
1700–1840**

New Haven and London: Yale University Press, published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2001, xiii + 296 pp., 200 b/w illus., 60 color illus. \$60.00, ISBN 0-300-08538-9.

London has its parks, its commons, several heaths, its squares, its fields, its hills, its flats, even its downs and marshes at Hackney, Leyton, Plumstead, and Erith. Yet it has also small private gardens—town gardens, as Longstaffe-Gowan calls them—which in acreage occupy far more of London than the celebrated public

spaces. And it was these that Longstaffe-Gowan first saw of London, when, as a young boy arriving from Panama to travel by train to Edinburgh, he looked out at the backs of the houses with their innumerable gardens, some shabby and unkempt, others meticulously tended with velvety lawns, pert sundials, and enameled flower beds. This is domesticity; think here of John Boorman's film *Hope and Glory* (1986), where the opening sequence, showing a world disrupted by war, rakes down a line of suburban gardens as "heads move back and forth above the fences that divide the narrow strips of land, moving to the sound of unseen lawn mowers."¹ Yet for all their interest, these gardens are curiously absent in any accounts of the city. Although more had been done in the Netherlands, it is only recently, since the 1980s, that British scholars have paid attention to the small town garden and to what Longstaffe-Gowan calls town-gardening within the urban culture of London in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The work of Erik de Jong and Marleen Domenicus-van Soest, and that of Elizabeth McKeller, Mark Laird, Andrea Fredericksen, and Ivan Hall are important precedents. Yet Longstaffe-Gowan, who is both a landscape architect and a historian of landscape architecture, brings in an additional perspective. And the present volume, which appeared at the same time as an exhibition on this theme at the Museum of London (to which the author acted as consultant), is the product of his two professions and finds its origin in those earlier years when he peered from the train into those many private sanctuaries.²

The story begins very clearly with the rebuilding of London after the fire of 1666. The hero was the Dutchman Nicholas Barbon, that early capitalist so praised by Marx. From the 1670s to the 1690s, as part of his program of speculative building, he divided the ground into regular streets in order to increase the number of houses that could be built, with as little frontage as possible. The City had no such spaces. And if there were a few open areas at Lincoln's Inn,

or Gordon Fields, or the large so-called Garden Grounds, set roughly where London Western Dock is now, these were nothing in space or usefulness to compare with the gardens—close gardens, specks of garden, little walled gardens in streets—that grew up behind these new terraced houses and in some of the new squares. To accompany them came a book by Thomas Fairbanks, *The City Gardner*, published first in 1722, republished in 1760 under the title *The London Gardner*. Both editions demonstrated what was being done to city gardens. They describe the growth of the London nursery trade, the redoing of several central gardens in the city squares, and, most importantly, the effect of the building of thousands of houses in Mayfair, Marylebone, Covent Garden, and Piccadilly, whose gardens needed attention. These books were aimed at the amateur gardeners, cultivating this innocent pleasure, in order, as Fairchild put it, to improve their talent, to ensure their quiet of mind, and “to be fix’d in a right Notion of Country Happiness, when their Affairs will permit them to reach such Pleasures” (18).

For Fairchild, the metropolis had three distinct areas, marked by their proximity to the River Thames, the density of their development, and, for him most significantly, the quality of their air. The healthiest part was near the Thames, especially west from the Temple to the Palace of Westminster; others were “the more inland Parts of the Town” (19) and then the spacious residential estates of the West End. The suggestions he made came from practical experience. Near London he had raised several thousands plants, “both from foreign countries and of the English Growth” (19), and he knew well what would flourish. Some plants that would not thrive in squares in the middle of town did well in the garden of the earl of Halifax near Parliament; others flourished at the Temple, the gardens there displaying great variety and what he called “a good Number of Exotic Plants” (19). But Fairchild encouraged readers to try plants where they were held com-



T. H. Shepherd, William Upcott’s back garden at 102 Upper Street in c. 1835, with the spire of Saint Mary, Islington, in the distance, watercolor

monly to fail: lilacs in garden squares, lindens, Virginia creeper, fruit trees, pears, mulberry, even fig trees as in Bridewell (there is still a Bridewell Place in between Fleet Street and New Bridge Street) and Roll’s Garden in Chancery Lane, where they had “ripen’d very well” (19). There were also many plants flourishing on balconies, and these also could demonstrate what was for Fairchild the particular achievement of city gardening, that is to say, the triumph over adversity and, whatever the artificiality, a representation of skill, vigilant application, and cultural sophistication. And, of course, there were now suppliers in and near London for all that gardeners needed. For example, such as Arabella Thomas near the Strand, who—as the advertisement noted—sold “all sorts of Garden Seeds . . . also shears, rakes, reels, hoes, spades, scythes . . . and all sorts of materials for gardening.”³

The next moment in this history

was the publication in 1838 of John Claudius Loudon’s *The Suburban Gardener*, which despite its title was as much concerned with small gardens as their larger cousins in the ever developing suburbs. Yet attitudes were changing. If in 1739 we can find a contributor to the journal *Common Sense* laughing at what he called the scanty and abortive attempts “of little Things to equal great Ones” (9)—that is, the small city garden pretending to be more—in 1839 in Dickens there is a more cutting description of these gardens, “in which there withers on from year to year a crippled tree . . . letting some sorry rheumatic sparrow to chirrup in its branches” (9).

As the history unfolds, the story becomes more complicated, and perhaps the account Longstaffe-Gowan gives at the end of his book cannot be as clear as that at the beginning. But with such figures as Humphrey Repton and Loudon and John Nash and even Decimus Burton

in play now, there was much more to say and do about the garden and the house. This was especially true in the contrast Loudon noted between the old-fashioned, expensive, and fussy conceits of the avowed art found in city gardens and that found in suburban gardens, where the family would escape the urban squalor to cultivate social harmony and sentimental domesticity in what he called “comparatively unlimited space” (248). The model imagined now might be that of Nash at Regent’s Park, where the sublime and the beautiful would play against each other, the terraces there magnificent and sublime, the smaller Park Villages suggesting elements within the sublime that in their unpretentious domesticity were closer to the merely beautiful. This, in the 1840s, is where the story ends. The last image we are given is that of William Blake and his beloved wife, Catherine, sitting naked in the summer house of their town garden in Lambeth, “freed” as Thomas Butts, who saw this, put it, “from those troublesome disguises which have prevailed since the Fall.” This was the small garden as a kind of fantasy, for the Blakes had been reading passages from *Paradise Lost* in character. “Come in,” William cried out, “it’s only Adam and Eve, you know” (252). We can only wonder what the neighbors, if they could see them, would have thought.

This is all fascinating. And if what I have written here is more a report than a review, this is in part because what especially struck me is the range, depth, and cultural interest of the details Longstaffe-Gowan has been able to bring together here. There is archaeology, most notably the report of excavations done at Chatham Dockyards, the best-preserved remains of early-eighteenth-century gardens in England. There are also certain printed sources to be used, estate books from London and beyond, those of the Crown Estates or of the duke of Bedford at Woburn or of the Grosvenors. And then there are the many images of the gardens in prints, drawings, and paintings, many of which are nicely reproduced here. This history shows us unfamiliar views of things—of Sir John

Soane’s House, or of men at Fitzroy Square, drawing a roller across the lawn; or it talks of unusual topics—the development of the jobbing gardener, or those stucco ornaments called eyecatchers set against the walls of neighboring houses, and there are one or two of these remaining in London. All this serves to bring out from the past the particularities of life that are so much those of our domestic lives now—buying and caring for plants, looking even in the densest of cities at gardens and thinking as the seasons pass about what is growing, what is dying. Grand buildings are fine and every city needs them, well designed and well built. But cities are spaces, small and large, and it is fascinating to think how our sense of space is grounded in what we had around us, in our houses or apartments. I grew up in a terraced house in South London, with a small garden at the front, a larger one at the back. But I will never forget my bliss in what seemed an infinite space when I visited my cousins who lived in a more expansive house in Kew, where the garden went around the house from front to side to back so that you could scamper all over without having to wipe your shoes. Committed to urban life, I also believe in the compactness of the city garden; but still, I cannot suppress my sense of the luxury and delight of the more generous, if perhaps wasteful, suburban gardens.

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Notes

1. John Boorman, *Hope and Glory* (London, 1987), 33.
2. This exhibition, organized by R. Atkins, T. Longstaffe-Gowan, and D. Pearson and on view at the Museum of London from 17 February to 30 April 2001, was interesting also in having a certain political agenda, namely (paraphrasing the press release), that the idea of such town gardens is contradicted by recent arguments in favor of high-density housing on what are called brownfield sites. This last term, less familiar perhaps on the other side of the Atlantic, refers to previously developed land, now in ruin but, in the words of one advocate, “of importance to bio-diversity, as nature has reclaimed many sites in the hearts of our towns and cities (and they often support both skylarks and linnets).”
3. Liza Picard, *Dr. Johnson’s London* (London, 2000), 243.

Cities

Karen Bowie, editor

La modernité avant Haussmann: Formes de l’espace urbain à Paris 1801–1853

Paris: Éditions Recherches, 2001, 408 pp.,
95 b/w illus. €92 (paper), ISBN 2-86222-
036-1.

The claim that Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, Prefect of the Seine from 1853 to 1870, deserves the lion’s share of credit for transforming Paris into the nineteenth century’s capital of modernity has been accepted as nearly incontrovertible fact ever since the publication of his *Mémoires* in 1890–1893 (see the new edition by Françoise Choay [Paris, 2000]). Confirming opinions already voiced at mid-century via newspapers and the specialized press, Haussmann attributed the modernization of Paris during the Second Empire to his plan for the city, which itself originated in a sketch that Napoleon III had put into his hands in 1853. The resulting Paris of tree-lined boulevards and regular limestone façades, supported by efficient systems of spatial and hygienic circulation, proved the prefect’s mastery of the political and economic forces produced in this age of industry, as he wielded the twinned instruments of a disciplined municipal bureaucracy and a boldly speculative scheme of capitalist financing in order to turn the imperial sketch into the physical and social order of an urban master plan. Under Haussmann’s administration, the critical idea of modernity and the critical practice of urbanism seemed at once to have been invented and coordinated in a theory of the industrial city that could be subjected to rational analysis and control. Artifact of modernity, Haussmann’s Paris became the measure for all other modern cities, and the twentieth century’s point of departure for writers like Walter Benjamin and architects like Le Corbusier, who saw in the city a transformative promise for the future through progressive ideological and formal change.