

Rousseau's Ecological Vision as a Resource for Combating Climate Change
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[A quick note about my uploaded paper. I apologize that some of the references still need to be supplied. Also, you should know that in my larger publication project, I will contrast Rousseau's garden (as found in *Julie*) with Darek Garman's "queer garden" (as found in his book and film, *The Garden*) and with William Shutkin's "urban garden" (as found in *The Land that Could Be*). Basically, the three gardens push us to think gardens as political models and as models of collaboration between humans and the more-than-human world.]

1) Introduction

My paper today is about a land, a garden, and its culture in Rousseau's best selling novel, *Julie*. However much the French Revolution is associated with Rousseau, it was the *Garden Revolution*, as found in *Julie*, that most captured his heart and announced his deepest love and hope as well as his most acerbic social, economic, and political critique. And, as it turns out, in *Julie* he critiqued European developments that have contributed to climate change, and, moreover, he offered a rich, detailed way of life (albeit fictional) that provides imaginative resources for combatting climate change.

I should tell you that this paper is part of a larger project, a book on what I am calling radical Romanticism. It is an investigation of progressive democratic, religious, and environmental perspectives that informed one another in 18th and 19th century British Romantic literature and its subsequent and sustained legacies in North America. I regard Romanticism both as an ideology to be critiqued and as an inheritance to be critically appropriated. So, that's the big project.

Rousseau is central to the story that I want to tell about radical Romanticism. At a time when many were ready to celebrate the age of Enlightenment and industry for the sake of human progress, Rousseau was employed by a 19th century counter-culture to tell a different kind of story. In this counter-cultural story, human progress—the advancement of the arts, sciences, and technology—is depicted as a tragedy. It is the story of the human departure from nature and the natural world—from Nature's Garden. It's the story of the rise of amour-propre (excessive self-regard), private property, social inequality, and the exploitation of humans and the natural world by those who possess wealth and power (the one implies the other, in Rousseau's view).

Moreover, in this Rousseauian counter-cultural narrative, to be close to nature is *not* to be sub-human. Who is "close to nature"? It is, for example, the romanticized Native American or the "European Solitaire," the one who is not corrupted by *oppressive* social conventions. Human denigration of the natural and social world, in Rousseau's view, is ultimately caused by alienation from nature and the natural world (but "the social" *per se*, as I will soon show, should not be juxtaposed to nature or the natural world).

It is hard to exaggerate what a profound shift this represents. Up until this time, a variety of intellectual and cultural western traditions had associated *men* with

spirit, mind, and high culture; while women and slaves, among others, were associated with materiality, the bodily, and the un-cultured—in a word, with the natural world. The spiritualized, intellectual man represented the height of humanity, the one made in the immaterial, spiritual image of God or of Plato's Forms. In this view, *nature is other* as are those associated with nature or the natural world, for example, women and slaves.

This association of the height of humanity with the immaterial, the disembodied, and the cultural has contributed greatly to our current ecological crises. We (Euro-Americans) don't honor dirt; we don't honor labor that pertains to food or food production; we don't honor the material, natural world—and hence we can burn it, pillage it, trash it, poison it, and still remain spiritual, intellectual cultural beings.

Given the plausible connection between disembodiment and environmental destruction, it seems like an important task is to think about how to connect people's identities to matter and manners of the earth and natural world—to materiality and to our bodies. But women, I noted, have for some time *already* been associated with the natural world, with materiality, and with the body. And that particular association has been deeply problematic. This is because the connection between women and the natural world went hand in hand with the dualism that severed the natural world from culture, mind, and spirit. In particular, the black woman's body in Euro-American imagination was frequently most closely connected to the primitive, the natural, the anti-cultural. And in many Western cultural narratives, women along with the rest of the natural world needed to be subdued in order to be made safe or useful.

Now, ecocriticism encourages humans to identify with and have affection for the natural world, including our bodies; and yet as long as the pervasive dualism that severs the natural world from culture, mind, and spirit is in place, it will be problematic for women to affirm their association with the natural world—for it may, in the end, just reaffirm gender stereotyping: women as natural, that is, uncultured creatures. In order for women to be appropriately identified with nature, their association with nature-as-that-which-must-be-subdued must be overturned; as must the identification of men (and men alone), especially white men, with spirit, intellect, and culture. In sum, then, the idea of *nature as other* must be dismantled. And Rousseau was one of the first modern Europeans to begin this work of dismantling the “nature as other” model (yet, as for dismantling gender stereotyping, Rousseau's legacy is more problematic). For Rousseau, the human identification with nature and the natural world was normatively beneficial. And, as I will argue, Rousseau not only challenged the “nature as other” model but he also challenged the destructive natural-social dualism.

Now, it might seem that Rousseau's remedy to our fall from the state of nature (assuming that there ever was one) would be a return to that state. But for Rousseau, that is not a human possibility. As it turns out, the fall from the state of nature was itself *natural*—or at least inevitable. The inherent, human capacities of freedom and perfectibility made the fall entirely predictable. Since Edmund Burke, everyone claims confidently that, in Rousseau's account, humans are born good—born natural—and then society corrupts them. And Rousseau did say as much on occasion. But the fuller Rousseauian account is that the *propensity to fall out of the state of nature is part of the human natural condition. It's only natural to fall*. And, as it turns

out, that “fall” led humans to a new, social form that is itself necessarily part of nature and entirely embedded in the natural world.

Rousseau proposed a variety of ways or paths to cope with our “fallen” condition. I will refer to some of these briefly below. For now, what is important to note is Rousseau’s acknowledgement that: 1) there is no escaping the social condition; 2) our social condition is embedded in nature and nature remains normative (but in complicated ways, e.g., moral commands are not written in nature); and 3) a central moral task is to integrate the social and the natural in ways that sustain just societies and natural ecosystems. And as I have claimed, pace the vast secondary material on Rousseau, *there is no radical gulf between the natural and the social*: nature led to the social and nature remains present in the social, more or less.

Equipped with his narrative about the state of nature and the human fall from it, Rousseau launched trenchant critiques of “progress” and modernity: of its science and technology, philosophies and religion, rapacious economies and the wars that accompany them, gross inequalities and the damage and destruction that modernity has unleashed on the natural world. It is hard to find a more cutting critiques of modernity.

There have been and continue to be environmentalists whose focus is primarily on protecting the natural world from denigration caused by humans. While these approaches have some merit, they have been justifiably criticized by such scholars as Macarena Gómez-Barris, Rob Nixon, and Kyle Whyte.¹ The general critique is that environmental approaches that focus “protecting the natural world” tend to neglect the broader geopolitical, economics contexts that bring mutual damage to both place and people—especially vulnerable populations. But if we could call Rousseau an early, proto-environmentalist, he would be in a different, a more holistic one category than those who focus on the natural world alone. He understood the intimate connection between the denigration of the natural world and social inequality and injustice; he understood that caring for the health of the natural world would entail reforming the social one—which would require a thorough going reformation of its politics and economics, its aesthetic sensibilities and its religion. In sum, Rousseau discerned a normative connection between environmental and social health and sickness. This position on the intimate connection between the social and natural world is a central characteristic of radical Romanticism, and a central focus for this paper.

For the remainder of the paper, I want to focus on the weighty challenge that Rousseau posed in *Julie* to a variety of European developments. By means of imaginative gardens, lands, and social relations, Rousseau crafted in *Julie* a profound environmental, economic, social, and political alternative to prevailing European sensibilities—the very sensibilities that have greatly contributed to the current climate change crisis. Rousseau’s most important political, aesthetic, and environmental vision and fantasy is found not in the social institutions of *Social Contract* but rather in *la terre*—specifically, the gardens and the alpine geography—of *Julie*. I focus on the gardens, lands, and household of Julie’s Alpine eco-community, Clarens, and on Julie’s private garden, her Elysium. In *Julie*, alpine geography (nature) and Clarens’s mountain manners (culture) do not fight and struggle against each other but rather support and augment each other (indeed, in this way Rousseau challenged the binary, nature/culture). And in this fusion of land and culture, Rousseau introduced alternative Western aesthetic sensibilities as well

as notions of labor, economy, and the land—all in response to modernization, industrialization, and nascent capitalism (for “Rousseau is capitalism’s most perceptive critic” [*Michael Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers*]). Land and culture in *Julie’s* gardens produce an environmental vision of a household or community economy embedded in a larger “natural economy,” that is, in the workings of the natural world. In the carefully cultivated lands and gardens of Clarens—its own micro universe—Rousseau brought together the useful and the beautiful, the public and the private, the natural and the social. This complex fusion offers an alternative, garden ecology to the prevailing exploitive market economy that has produced climate change among other environmental calamities. I wish now, then, to focus on *Julie’s* lands and garden, one of our earliest examples of an environmentally sustainable household economy that provides resources for combating climate change and that challenges prevailing capitalistic practices that exploit both laborers and the land.

Before I continue, however, I must note that women are essential to Rousseau’s fantasy, for Julie—like her Elysium, her hidden garden—becomes artifice and nature joined in one person. Her transformation, however, is possible only by the work of that central agent, the land—by alpine geography informing mountain manners. Yet in the end, not even alpine geography can sustain the precarious balance between the natural and the social. Tragically, it *must* collapse—as must Julie herself. And once again, *women are sacrificed in the Western imagination*.

And yet it should be noted that Julie is Rousseau’s ideal *human*: she is candid, sincere and authentic. She pursues friendship, character, and wisdom, not wealth, power, and status. She is practical and uninterested in frivolity or luxury, yet she seeks beauty and simple pleasures. She is spiritual but not religious, that is, her love of God is expressed by service to humanity and not by the recitation of dogmas and participation in baroque rituals. Her God is enjoyed not in a suffocating church, but rather in expansive nature. In sum, Julie is Rousseau model of the virtuous human—male or female.

2) Clarens on the Paths to Redemption

Rousseau’s Second Discourse (***Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality***) is largely about an imagined time of human innocence in Nature’s Garden (the state of nature) and about our fall from the Garden. But the question of *restoration* or redemption dominated much of Rousseau’s thought. He proposed two different, even contrary, remedies: an extreme public path and an extreme private path. The public path, as found in *On the Government of Poland*, recommends that individuals ensconce themselves snugly within a highly nationalistic, educative community; the private path, as found in *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, recommends that individuals—solitaires—cultivate a spiritual, interior life, and extricate themselves from commitments and other social entanglements that exacerbate the human propensity to inflict harm. The one calls for the complete loss of the private life, the other the loss of the public. Both are effective if the goal is to live undividedly; both are inadequate if the goal is to live a full, flourishing human existence.

Rousseau’s most famous path to (partial) restoration is what I call his *middle way*—that of the Flourishing City as depicted in the *Social Contract*. This is his attempt to bring together the two paths, the public and private. This attempt has

notable implications for democratic theory (how to balance or integrate the duties and prerogatives of the individual and with those of the body politique).

There is, however, another option (the focus of today's talk): it is what I call *the way of the Mountain Community* as found in *Julie*. This is the way of friendship, love, marriage, community, and just and agreeable labor. It's also the way of an intimate and ecological relation to the natural world. And, unlike the other proposed paths to redemption, this one is expressed by women and, in salient ways, depends on women.

This path runs between the private path and the middle way, and hence it can be called the *moderate private* path. "Moderate," because it does not revolve around the

solitaire; "private," because at its center stands the *household* or *community*, and not an inclusive

common good of something like a nation-state. This path—the way of the Mountain Community, the way of Clarens, Julie's household—incarnates Rousseau's deepest political and environmental fantasy and attempts the precarious balance between solitariness and sociability and between "nature" and art. Clarens, then, is the name of Julie's household but also the name of Rousseau's political-*domestic, environmental* fantasy. Rousseau's ideal home was never Nature's Garden inhabited by the Solitaires, those barely human creatures. Rather, it was this *Second Garden*, the Mountain Community. The Community is inhabited by good natured, hard-working, independent folk who experience daily the brute necessity and unadorned beauty of the natural world. Clarens is more than a home. It is a way of life.

This way of life is held together by a multitude of miraculous balancing acts. Clarens's mountain manners and Alpine geography manage to keep everything in place, at least provisionally. The mountain manners provide moral sustenance and just practices while checking false needs (those of *amour-propre*). The severe Alpine geography brings natural necessity into the daily life at Clarens, encouraging social interdependence but not frivolous or destructive sociability. Together, the land and the manners that it cultivates form Clarens: a place where the self is neither extinguished nor puffed up, but lives in accord with itself, others, work, the divine, and the natural world.

3) *The land—the natural world--informs moral dispositions*

In *Julie*, Rousseau embedded the idea that the land—*la terre*—informs moral, aesthetic, and spiritual dispositions. Rousseau had drafted or outlined what he thought would become one of his most important works, *Moral Sensitivity*, or *The Materialism of the Wise*.² In this project, Rousseau wanted to show that human character, practices, and ways of life are informed not only by our *sociolinguistic* environment but also our *physical* one. It is no coincidence that Clarens is located high in the Swiss mountains. The mountains, and the hardy way of life that they demand, endow the residents with a particular type of character and intimate relation to the non-human world.

Rousseau was one of the first to ascribe such agency to the land, that is, to the material, physical world (a world that includes such built environments as Paris). In his view, the physical world shapes humans even as humans shape the physical

world. Human ethical formation, for Rousseau, is produced not only by culture (including sociolinguistic practices) or by biological inheritance (what we would describe as genetic DNA and cognitive foundations) but by the physical environment as well, or rather by the physical environment in relation to other sources of human life. Today we are accustomed to the view that humans are shaped by culturally specific, sociolinguistic practices. Who would doubt that? When we do debate this view, we speak in terms of nature-versus-nurture, asking: What's the greater influence on our lives, social environment or genetic constitution? (hence the psychologists' preoccupation with separated twins). But Rousseau considered a third influence, namely, the capacity of external landscapes—be they rural or urban—to shape character, interiority, and the emergent communities to which we belong. Are we not informed and reformed by the material environment that holds us? The salutary aspects of Clarens are not, of course, due to geography alone. The Alpine geography works dialectically with Clarens' mountain manners. Like Emile's tutor or the *Social Contract's* Great Legislator, the mountain manners at Clarens nourish the self without prompting false needs, anomic desires, and vicious amour-propre. The mountain manners also serve to cultivate social practices that work with and demonstrate a just piety toward a central source of life, the Alpine land itself.

Subsequent Romantic authors as Dorothy and William Wordsworth in Britain or Margaret Fuller and Thoreau in the U.S. would continue this practice of ascribing agency or “autonomous presence” to the physical environment, especially to natural ecosystems variously delimited. They did not suggest that the natural ecosystems possess a Kantian, radically autonomous will. Rather, like Rousseau, they affirmed a complex interconnection between humans and the rest of the world whose identity confronts and informs our own. Ultimately, they present a portrait of a shared agency, as the human and the non-human transactionally engage and produce—or “co-create”—the planet in which all dwell. Rousseau, I have said, was one of the first to offer the view that humans do not confront or control the natural (or material) world but rather, as embedded members, they are shaped by it and they co-create with it. *The materialism of the wise* is to acknowledge and honor the materialism that sustains us is. That form of wise materialism, we will soon see, is powerfully portrayed in the physical environs of Julie's community.

4) Aesthetic and Religious Sensibilities

Rousseau, in *Julie*, revolutionized Western aesthetic and religious sensibilities. Travelers used to shutter their carriages when crossing the Alps to protect them from the ugly, barbarian landscapes—those uncouth, god-forsaken, jagged peaks. Rousseau turned this aesthetic upside down: he'd get out and walk to experience more intimately the wild, Alpine landscape.³ In Rousseau's imagination, the Alps represented the furthest contrast to the world of corrupt human institutions—not a contrast to humanity or social institutions per se, but to unjust, exploitive, capitalistic ways of life. His praise and descriptions of the Alps put into play a new aesthetic that would shape the Romantic imagination and that inaugurated the genre, *Nature Writing*. And this new aesthetic taste of what *counted* as sublimely beautiful—the torturous, irregular, Alpine landscape—produced a new vision of the form, the ethos, of the ideal *garden*. For Rousseau and subsequent generations,

the formal, “artificial” garden with its “unnaturally” shaped trees and geometric, regular design became viewed as a deformation of nature. The now celebrated “natural” garden, in contrast, was to be asymmetrical, overflowing, and irregular. The “natural” garden” was to be crafted as an “artificial wilderness.”⁴ (And I’ll soon have more to say about the role of the garden in Rousseau’s environmental, political model.)

Moreover, this new Rousseauian aesthetic had a profound religious dimension. If you want to worship, go outside. That which had once been considered grotesque is now the new church for worship and the new setting for revelation and religious education. The Alps are not simply the *context* for spiritual edification; they are the *text* itself. Rousseau’s religious aesthetic declared that in the natural world we are most likely to receive spiritual revelation—to learn most about Spirit and about human nature and its relation to the non-human world. And no Rousseauian figure expresses this new religious aesthetic better than Julie. Her husband, Wolmar, is driven to atheism having been raised in a dogmatic, ritualistic, “artificial,” Christian tradition (p. 348). Julie, in contrast, possess a lively, dynamic faith that is directly connected to the beauty of the earth as well as to the goodness—and the suffering—of fellow humans and non-humans (p. 350, 351, 349). Her religious faith does not sever her from the meaning of the earth and from its relationships. Rather, it connects her to life—both human and non-human. Hers is a worldly religion. Unlike Julie, Wolmar is unable to sympathize sufficiently with the suffering of his fellow humans and non-human creatures because, without the benefit of a spiritual connection to the natural world, his moral reasoning is cold and detached (p. 351).

So, Rousseau converted that which was considered to be ugly and God forsaken into that which is beautiful and divine. And his moral and spiritual accounts of the natural world would greatly influence such British Romantics as Wordsworth, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Mary Shelley and such North American ones as Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and Thoreau. I should note, however, that although Rousseau extolled Alpine landscapes in *Julie* and elsewhere, he wrote poignantly of the human relation to a variety of lands, including lands worked by humans. In *Julie*, for example, he described the vegetable gardens and the cultivated but not ornate grounds of *Clarens* as superbly beautiful and agreeable (to be discussed below). In the *Confessions*, he wrote of the beauty and redemptive powers of a land well attended and occupied by chickens, cows, useful gardens and by such activities as grape harvesting and fruit gathering.⁵ Moreover, Rousseau found God not only in jagged mountainous vistas but in cultivated lands as well. Rousseau noted that as he would walk through vineyards and orchards, he would say his prayers, “raising his heart toward the Creator of that beauteous Nature whose charms lay beneath [his] eyes.” He went on to assert, “I have never like to pray in a room...I love to contemplate God in His works.”⁶

Rousseau’s religious aesthetic is found throughout *Julie* but also in his best-selling educational treatise and novel, *Emile* (published a year after *Julie*). When the pupil Emile is ready for his religious education, the wise Savoyard priest becomes his spiritual guide. What is significant, however, is not only *who* offers the spiritual guidance but *where* it takes place. The wise guide leads his pupil “out of town” to up a high hill from where he and Emile could witness a beautiful valley “crowned by the vast chain of the Alps.” Of this place and time, Emile states that is was:

the fairest picture which the human eye can see. You would have thought that nature was displaying all her splendor before our eyes to furnish *a text for our conversation*. After contemplating this scene for a space *in silence*, the man of peace -the Savoyard priest] spoke to me.⁷

A common mistake is to assume that the creed of the Savoyard priest is found exclusively in the priest's words. This is a serious error. Emile's spiritual education starts and ends in *the land* that presents itself to him and in *the silence* that is reverently offered and in which the revelation is received. What is the nature of this revelation and silent worship? Is this "Nature worship," or the worship of God in and through nature? Is this Nature revealing its divine self, or nature revealing God? Are we close to or far from orthodox Christianity? Both positions—and all the tension between them—are presented in *Julie* and *Emile*.

There is a close connection between the Savoyard Priest's central lesson and the very idea of receiving revelation in and through the land. Emile's spiritual guide counsels him to seek an inward authority—the voice of conscious—that is supported by the voice of nature (which is associate with the natural world). The ultimate revelatory guide for life, then, consists in *an attunement* between the inner and outer—the inward authority of the self and the outer authority of "nature." Emile is to look inward (or as that North American Romantic Emerson would later say, "Obey thyself"); but Emile is also to look outward (or as that British Romantic Wordsworth would later say, look to "the round ocean, and the living air,/And the blue sky," to that presence which "rolls through all things"—look for and see signs of spirit in the world around us and within us.⁸ This form of subjective universality—this harmonizing dance between inner and outer—is distinctively Romantic, and is distinctively Rousseauian. The Savoyard Priest channeled this view when Rousseau had him say, "I perceive God everywhere in His works. I sense Him *in* me; I see Him all *around* me."⁹ Indeed, Rousseau's notion of God or Spirit often challenged the binary, inner and outer.

Rousseau thereby inaugurated an aesthetic form of revelation and knowledge that is still very much with us today. Additionally, he crafted a particular practice to receive revelation and knowledge. Rousseau (and later Wordsworth and Emerson, among others) would have us step back from the noise, chaos, and oppressive ways of industrial, capitalistic life in order to gain personal equanimity but also public perspective. This "stepping back" may seem purely private but it possesses a public purpose. One "withdraws" (as we commonly call moving *forward* into alternative ways of being) for the sake of an enhanced private life but also a public vision and critical perspective.

Rousseau's religious aesthetic is also noteworthy for what it declares about human nature and its relation to the non-human world. In *Julie* and elsewhere, Rousseau brought attention to the continuity between humans and non-human creatures. Rationality, for Rousseau, was not the mark of a supposed human exceptionalism that radically separated humans from non-human creatures. Indeed, in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau went so far as to claim that "Nature" never intended humans to be creatures of reflection (a human who meditates "is a depraved animal").¹⁰ This claim is quite the rebuke to Descartes' "I think and therefore I am." Of course, as humans become social creatures, reflection

and self-consciousness becomes part of the human condition—for better, for worse. Reflection enables humans to become normative, moral creatures but it also contributes to a host of social and personal woes such as inequality, exploitation, and alienation from both the social and natural world. For present purposes, however, I simply want to note that Rousseau troubled the importance and the role of rationality.

This move is significant for thinking about the human relation to the non-human. For insofar as Rousseau argued that we view ourselves chiefly as suffering creatures rather than rational ones, we can identify with animals as *mutual sufferers*. This normative position led Rousseau advocate for what we today call animal rights (and he was one of the first to do so). Rousseau placed a great premium on *pitié*—on the capacity to sympathize with others, humans and non-humans alike. Rousseau’s insistence on treating animals decently springs from his *minimizing* the distinction between animals and humans, or rather his *maximizing* the identity between the two. This line of thought reveals not only Rousseau’s conception of our moral duties to animals, *but his understanding of human nature and its continuity with the non-human*. In this regard, Rousseau provided a radical critique of those before him—such as Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes; Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin — who championed human exceptionalism and thereby radically severed humans from the rest of the natural world.

Rousseau’s new religious aesthetic, as found in *Julie*, also portrayed the natural world not as a static, passive machine to be exploited but as a dynamic, active expression of Spirit to be revered and treated with respect. The natural world moves and evolves, and that dynamic natural world includes human animals who, as seen in the *Second Discourse* among other writings by Rousseau, are also dynamic and evolving, and often in response to the natural world. This idea was revolutionary. And, as we will soon see, Rousseau insisted that there is a potential, achievable accord between dynamic “nature” and its dynamic humans, but dissonance is also a possibility—indeed in Rousseau’s view, dissonance is a likelihood.

5) Work and Home Economics (*Oikonomia*) at Clarens

For good reason, when we think of the term Alpine landscape or even rural landscape, we typically imagine the solitaire contemplating the distant, sublime or picturesque vista. And Rousseau, to some extent, contributed to this often unhelpful notion. But in fact Rousseau and others in the radical Romantic tradition employed the term, “landscape” or simply “the land,” to refer to a wide range of lands—commercial sites and farm lands, gagged peaks and gentle valleys, dry deserts and lush gardens, large cities and small communities. I now, then, wish to turn to Rousseau’s most revolutionary landscape, namely, that small eco-community known as Clarens—Julie’s home, *Julie’s republic*.

Work rests at the heart of Clarens. Alienation from labor was an abiding concern for Rousseau. He feared that as capital in international markets became more fluid, as profit dominated all other goals, and as the division of labor increased, workers were increasingly exploited and found limited meaning and satisfaction in their work. Labor at Clarens, in Rousseau’s imagination, challenged these unhappy trends. St. Preux summed up Clarens’ alternative way of life and work in a single sentence:

“One sees nothing in this household which does not join together the agreeable and the useful, but the useful occupations are not confined to pursuits which yield profit.” (O. c., ii, 470; Julie, pp. 304). (in general, 301ff, for description of household)

At Clarens, the very idea of work is redefined. Reduced neither to profit nor to efficiency, work is yoked to that which is purposeful and agreeable. Rousseau, like Marx, sought to remind us that we are sensuous, tactile creatures who find our vocation in congenial work. In Rousseau’s fantasy, Clarens’ sustainable labor practices (working in accord with the natural and social world) stood in stark contrast to the exploitive, economic, political institutions on which most laborers were dependent. At Clarens, one is actively connected to the land and there is an intimate connection between people, place, and institutions; outside Clarens in Paris (for example), one passively works within oppressive social structures and experiences a disconnection from the social and natural world.

Clarens is one of the first eco-visions that exemplifies a sustainable, interdependent relation between humans and their non-human environment. The home and its grounds are simple, practical, and agreeable. Beauty and utility are brought together, trading luxury and opulence for sustainability and joy in its natural and social world. As St Preux notes, the house was altered to match the newly devised sustainable practices of Clarens: “it is no longer a house made to be seen but to be inhabited.”¹¹ The grounds, too, have been transformed. In place of the old billiard room, for example, is now a useful wine press and a dairy room. Practical but beautiful vegetable gardens now adorn the property: “The vegetable garden was too small for the cooking; they made a second one out of the flower bed, but one so well put together that the flower bed thus converted pleases the eye more than before.”¹² Vineyards are planted, and decorative trees are replaced by fruit, nut, and shade trees. All in all, “everywhere they have substituted the useful for the agreeable, and yet the useful has almost always become agreeable.”¹³

This is a powerful ecovision. The contemporary equivalent is the micro-homestead or apartment complex where people replace the poison perfect lawns and ornamental shrubs and trees for vegetable gardens, berries patches, and fruit trees; where chickens roam freely, water is capture in water barrels, and the housing itself is as simple as it is comfortable. It is an environmental and economic aesthetic that deems the modest, practical environmental footprint as the truly beautiful.

Now, it may seem that Clarens is entirely natural, as if it emerged directly from its mountain soil. In fact, however, *every aspect of Clarens is shaped by imagination and hands in cooperation with the natural world.* This mingling of wildness and cultivation—this

“natural” sociability—is best captured by Rousseau’s portrayal of Julie’s garden, her Elysium. The revolutionary vision of Clarens (in which humans dwell sustainably and justly in and of the natural world) is intimately connected to Julie’s revolutionary garden. The garden is physically connected to the heart of Clarens (it is “quite close to the house,” a mere “twenty paces”¹⁴) but also spiritually connected, for Julie’s garden expresses the spirit of Clarens: a place where the natural and the social are in accord.

6) Julie’s Garden

The original garden—the state of nature—in Rousseau’s *Second Discourse* is *the work of nature* alone. Julie’s Elysium, in contrast, is *a work of art*. Once again, Rousseau

sought to declare that there is no going back to the original garden. There is no place—no garden, no land—where nature alone rules, and in this way Rousseau anticipated the Anthropocene. All places now are co-created by humans and nature, together—for better, for worse. The central question for us—the central question that Rousseau asked of us—is will our co-created place be a work of life-enhancing art (such as Clarens and its Elysium) or will it be a work of destruction? Before exploring the permutation of that question, however, let's linger in Julie's garden, Rousseau's most verdant and perhaps most revolutionary statement.

Upon entering the Elysium, whose gate would have been impossible to find without Julie's assistance, St. Preux (Julie's former teacher and lover) is struck by the dense foliage, the abundance of flowers, the sound of a running brook, and the singing of birds: "I thought I saw the wildest place, the most solitary in nature, and it seemed I was the first mortal who had ever penetrated this wilderness." Once inside the Elysium, St. Preux returns to Nature's Garden, or at least it seemed that way. The Elysium displayed nothing of the symmetry or artificiality of the formal, eighteenth century French gardens. Following along the "tortuous and irregular alleys" of the garden, St. Preux is struck by how the garden appeared to be "without order or symmetry" [*p. 388-89, Stewart trans]. It *appears* to St. Preux as "uncultivated and wild."¹⁵ So when Julie declares that the Elysium is entirely under her direction, St. Preux balks, "I do not see at all any evidence of human work," and he insists that the garden "only cost Julie neglect." As is her way, Julie is patient yet firm with St. Preux: "It is true that nature has done everything, but under my direction" (O. c., ii, 71-72; Julie, p. 305). Here in the Elysium, nature and art pull together. Where is agency located? Who or what is the central mover and shaper of the garden—Julie or the natural world? There is no simple answer. *Rousseau troubled the idea of a singular, sovereign agent.* We are always co-creators with and within the natural world. Again, the central question is: what shall we create? A sustainable social and natural world in which to dwell? Or a world that lacks sustainable beauty and accord?

When Julie states, "nature has done everything," she acknowledges a fundamental environmental principle as well as a statement of piety. The fundamental environmental principle is to recognize that all that we have and are is the result, in one way or another, of nature's matter and manners (while also affirming that humans work nature, alter nature, and belong to the natural world). The statement of piety is to recognize and honor this foundational source of life, the natural world.

Julie's Elysium *is* natural insofar as only nature, not Julie, can give birth to a flower or a bird. Natural also insofar as Julie—like the local residents of Wordsworth's Lake District—chooses not to import "exotic plants or fruits," but rather to utilize those that are "natural to the country."¹⁶ Still, it is Julie who planted and cultivated the raspberries, currants, lilac bushes, wild grapes, hops, jasmine, and hazel trees. And it is Julie who diverted the water from an ornamental, superfluous fountain to make a brook, and who enticed the birds to reside in her sustainable garden. Julie's garden, like the rest of Clarens, is the result of nature's ways and the human imagination working together sustainably and wisely.

Rousseau had seen, first hand, how capitalism, classism, and modern aesthetics had damaged otherwise ecologically productive and beautiful lands by converting them into manicured gardens with exotic, imported species of plants

and trees, or else by overfarming lands and exploiting laborers for the sake of supporting lavish, opulent lifestyles. Such exploitation of laborers and the destruction to local lands and the wildlife that depends on them was, of course, a work of art—that is, human effort driven by an aesthetic. Yet in contrast to this destructive aesthetic, Rousseau offered an aesthetic that was committed to the flourishing of people and place alike. It required work. It required the human imagination. But this human toil and creation worked sustainably with both natural ecosystems and social institutions.

Manfred Kusch and Lester Crocker, among others, have argued that in the work of Rousseau and the western imagination more generally, the garden stands as the antithesis to wilderness, disorder, and chaos.¹⁷ Of Julie's garden in particular, Kusch claims that "it establishes ...the binary opposition of inside/outside, garden/wilderness, civilization/Nature...."¹⁸ However, I have argued that, precisely by means of Julie's garden, Rousseau rejected such binaries as "order and disorder, harmony and chaos, the garden and the non-garden."¹⁹ Julie's garden does not exclude wilderness nor even disorder and chaos. Indeed, Julie labors to import wilderness, disorder, and chaos into her garden. [*note St. Preux's description of the garden as "rustic and wild; I see no human labor here", p. 388, Stewart trans]. Like Kusch, Crocker claims that there is in *Julie* a binary between Julie's garden and wilderness—the wilderness of the pristine forests outside Clarens.²⁰ But there is, in fact, great continuity between Julie's garden and the forests and the greater Valais. The garden has been fashioned to imitate the irregularity, the self-sufficiency, and the simplicity of the forests. And the people of Clarens and Julie's garden, like the people of Valais, seek to embrace the "simplicity" of the land.²¹

I have emphasized the continuity between Julie's garden, Clarens, and the surrounding environs. But the garden also possesses its own distinctive identity and role. The chapter (the letter) that describes the garden in great detail begins with a reflection on the role of "agreeable leisure" and good work: while the agreeable and the useful come together in good work, the "alternation of labor and enjoyment is our genuine vocation."²² The distinctive purpose of the garden is to provide "agreeable leisure." This is not to deny that labor is required to maintain the garden. But Rousseau went to great lengths to emphasize the simplicity of the garden. Indeed, part of the wonder of Julie's art in making the garden is how it is both a full and lush "artificial wilderness" and also a low maintenance garden. Even the initial making of the garden was inexpensive; indeed, as Julie notes, "it cost me nothing", p. 388, Stewart trans*]. The garden, then, is to be understood more as a place of repose than labor. And our "genuine vocation"—the art of sustainable living—requires a special kind of repose or enjoyment. There are forms of repose, what Rousseau called "indolent idleness," that do not contribute to the art of living.²³ In contrast to indolent idleness, Rousseau put forward and inaugurated a major theme in Romanticism, namely, *purposeful idleness*, or what Wordsworth would later call "wise passivity," or Thoreau's "the art of walking," "a genius...for sauntering."²⁴ Julie's garden most fully expresses Claren's opposition to a way of life systematically structured for the sake of maximized, capitalistic profit. The garden is dedicated to, and is a symbol of, the non-utilitarian, counter-cultural practice of purposeful idleness. As we will see in subsequent chapters, this particular form of radical Romantic idleness poses a major challenge to global neoliberalism and to those industrial engines that exhaust people and land alike.

Julie's Alpine eco-community, Clarens, and its inner sanctum, Julie's Elysium, is Rousseau's most sustained attempt to craft a vivid, self-contained world that served as a striking alternative to the rapacious economic, social, and political orders of the day. In the garden and in the form of life that supports it (which includes Clarens and the surrounding Alpine geography) we find Rousseau's most important religious, political, aesthetic, and environmental vision and fantasy. The world of Clarens and its garden palpably illustrate Rousseau's hope for how we can live peaceably and justly with fellow humans and the natural world that sustains us. It also strikingly illustrates Rousseau's penetrating critique of prevailing economic, social, and political European sensibilities. Armed with the garden, Rousseau declared a revolution. As noted above, it was the Garden Revolution that most captured his heart and announced his deepest hope and most penetrating critiques.

And the "wild" is central to this Garden Revolution. Many commentators have justifiably commented on the artifice of Julie's garden. Julie's artfulness, however, is not principally one of deception but of creation—or still better, of co-creation. Julie's art consists in inviting the wild into her garden and co-creating with it. In the end, the garden does not only *look* wild; it *is* wild. Hence Julie felt the need to correct St. Preux. He had initially thought the garden was "all natural" and then subsequently concluded that it was "all artifice." Correcting his later view, Julie declares, "Everything you see is wild...it's enough to put [them] in the ground, and they [robust plants] grow on their own."²⁵ Ultimately, of course, Rousseau—via Julie—sought to challenge St. Preux's binary insistence that the garden must be either wild or artful. Julie is consistent in her position: the garden is wild and cultivated, *both*. As we saw in chapter **, the wild always resides in the cultivated, but some forms of cultivation are wiser than others.

And this brings me to a second, related sense in which the garden is wild. The garden (and Clarens more generally) is wild insofar as it challenges destructive economic, social, and environmental conventions. The wild, cultivated garden is the work of—and symbol of—a wild culture. In this wild culture, workers are treated with dignity. Work is understood as participation in the art of living, not the maximization of economic utility and the accrual of social status. Tyranny is replaced with community. And the natural world is understood not as an unlimited resource made to satisfy—via extraction, production, and consumption—unlimited human desire. Rather, the natural world is understood as a practical and beautiful home shared by humans and non-humans. In this shared home, the fruits may appear "unhandsome" for they do not grow in the productive, extractive orchard; but they are nevertheless "excellent" and bring "pleasure" for they are the fruit of a thoughtfully cultivated land, that "artificial wilderness."²⁶ And the garden is indeed a shared home. When St. Preux intends to compliment Julie by noting that the birds in the garden are her "guests and not prisoners," Julie pushes back—once again correcting St. Preux's limited male sight—"Who are you calling guests? It is we who are theirs."²⁷

Julie's Clarens and its garden, then, is a shared and co-created ecological garden that stands as a powerful alternative to prevailing exploitive market economies and their modes of extraction, production, and consumption. As a revolutionary alternative, the garden offers a capacious home that sustainably integrates culture and nature such that humans may live simply and justly in both the social and natural world. It thereby provides a profound set of normative beliefs

and practices that are desperately needed as we face such social and environmental challenges as climate change, the bioaccumulation of industrial toxins, soil erosion and deforestation, the marginalization and displacement of communities for the sake of infrastructural development or resource extraction, the exploitation of land and people alike in “extractive zones.”²⁸ Rousseau’s literary garden participates in a tradition of revolutionary utopian thought and, moreover, it forges a new tradition of physical revolutionary gardens that serves as a “symbol of political resistance.”²⁹ Whether literary or physical, the garden can graphically incarnate a just state of affairs and thereby demonstrate how things *could be* outside the garden. Gardening as a radical, political act cultivates sustainable and ethical practices in one place, now, in the hope that such practices will prevail or at least propagate elsewhere, in the future. Planting “seeds for radical change” is the gardener’s hope and goal.³⁰

“Seeds for radical change” was certainly Rousseau’s hope. He was also interested in cultivating a *taste* for change. Almost twenty percent of the Elysium chapter is a discussion of taste.³¹ Those eager to display their wealth or else their pedantic, botanical knowledge exhibit a “false taste.” The former seeks “grandeur” by cultivating showy lawns and straight avenues of perfectly erect, bald trees; the latter—those “professors of the garden”—seek acclaim by ripping plants from their native environments and displaying them like a jumbled display of jewels in a museum.³² Such false taste is contrasted with an “uncorrupted taste” that shuns boastful ostentation and the unjust institutions that support wealthy and powerful braggarts (**pp. 396-397). Genuine taste delights in neither the purchased “formality” of the elitist’s garden nor the overly botanized plants of the collector, but rather in the simplicity of the everyday, in “the common grasses, common shrubs, and a few trickles of water flowing without frills” (**p. 397). “Uncorrupted taste,” of course, pertains to making skillful judgments about not only the art of gardening but also about the art of living—living simply, justly, and sustainably. In many ways, “uncorrupted taste” is Thoreauvian: it delights in ways of life and institutions that promote simple pleasures and radical justice. By making do with less—by escaping the quagmire of the capitalistic culture of over extraction and consumption—those with good taste cultivate rebellious gardens and lives that challenge the aesthetic and political status-quo. By means of his craft in radical aesthetics, Rousseau’s ultimate goal was to cultivate a taste for the kind of *culture*—beliefs and practices—that support the social, political, and environmental justice that is found in Julie’s Clarens and garden.

9) *Back to the Land*

Clarens, Rousseau’s deeply flawed fantasy, remains one of his most important statements of social protest. It was a protest against those market economies that were encouraging anomie, acquisitiveness, a brutal division of labor, and alienation from self, work, community, and the natural world. Clarens and its innermost sanctuary, Julie’s garden, served as a powerful social complaint against developing modern economies and the destructive, acquisitiveness that flowed from them. Moreover, its family and friendships condemned the utilitarian character of the marriages and friendships of Rousseau’s age. In the effort to accumulate public status and wealth, spouses and friends were deemed useful. Clarens challenged this exploitation of private life for public attention and personal gain. Family and friends, in Rousseau’s view, offer gifts of affection and moral support, not wealth

and status. The realms of intimacy at Clarens opposed the cold, calculating, public world of Hobbesian market relations and Parisian social climbing.

Clarens, then, has much to teach us much about the symptoms and causes of modern alienation. Clarens also has much to contribute to ecocriticism. In constructing Clarens, Rousseau seemed to have identified one of the most important threats to the environment and to democracy: the ways of *amour-propre*, which fuel anomic desire, the quest for wealth and power, and which contribute to unsustainable environmental practices and to structural social inequality. He provides a significant tool for contemporary environmental and democratic critique. Environmentally, this critique suggests that while science, technology, and policy contribute importantly to addressing environmental problems, we also need to address those fundamental dispositions, beliefs, desires, and practices that determine how we interact with the natural world around us. Learning to live sustainably, in other words, is a spiritual, cultural challenge and not just a technical one. This would seem to be one of Rousseau's chief lessons. Not only did he grasp the connection between environmental and social harm, he also understood that the remedy for such harm required nothing less than a transformation of our politics, morals, and technology. Clarens and its mountain manners serve an example of precisely such a remedy.

Some deep ecologists of the happy-minded type (to use William James's term*) seem to say: "Just recognize your true nature—just listen to nature—and you will see that your true self is really an expanded Self that includes all things, and hence you simply will not *want* to live in an environmentally destructive fashion anymore. You don't need to strive morally to radically re-shape yourself and the institutions in which you are embedded. It will just happen once you and everyone else recognizes his or her true Nature."

Rousseau offered a different approach: the self needs to be *fundamentally* altered, shaped and transformed—as do our social institutions—and in ways that acknowledges that we are embedded in the natural world, that we are embedded in social worlds, and that there are better and worse ways (normatively speaking) to live in those worlds. Flourishing ways of life will honor the natural world, will foster *amour de soi* and *pitié*, and will blunt *amour propre*.³³ These flourishing ways of life, by definition, will need to be responsive to one's particular sociohistorical and geographical position. Our environmental *and* cultural crises require a radical transformation of self and society, and that will not come from just saying, "Listen to Nature"—or, "Listen to the inward voice of conscience." In a phrase, we need to *cultivate* natural *pitié* and *amour de soi* (and all that that means) under our particular sociohistorical conditions. The virtues only operate outside "Nature's Garden." We live outside the Garden—Rousseau was clear about this. We need, then, to *cultivate* democratic, environmental virtues. It's only natural. And Clarens offers us Rousseau's best approximation of a sustainable society outside Nature's Garden, and it thereby provides normative resources as we attempt address such environmental challenges as climate change.

Notes

¹ **provide reference

² ** provide a reference

³ Rousseau's celebration of the Alpine landscape is not confined to *Julie*. In the *Confessions*, for example, he wrote of his "need for torrents, rocks, firs, dark woods, mountains, steep roads to climb or descend, abysses beside me to make me afraid" (Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. J. M. Cohen [London: Penguin, 1953], p., 162).

⁴⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, or the New Heloise*, trans. Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press 1997), p. 389.

⁵ Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin, 1953), p. 220.

⁶ Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin, 1953), p. 225.

⁷ **supply reference

⁸ **supply reference to Emerson, and to WW's Intimations.

⁹ **fil out ref: Emile, Bloom trans, p. 277. Emphasis added.

¹⁰ add fuller reference, p. 56, 2nd discourse

¹¹ **add reference

¹² **add reference

¹³ **add reference

¹⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, or the New Heloise*, trans. Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press 1997), p. 387.

¹⁵ **add ref

¹⁶ **add ref

¹⁷ See Manfred Kusch, "The River and the Garden Basic Spatial Models in *Candide* and *La Nouvelle Heloise*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 12 (1978): pp. 1-15; and Lester Crocker, "Order and Disorder in Rousseau's Social Thought," *PMLA* (the journal of the Modern Language Association of America) 94 (1979): 247-260.

¹⁸ Manfred Kusch, "The River and the Garden Basic Spatial Models in *Candide* and *La Nouvelle Heloise*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 12 (1978): pp. 11.

¹⁹ Manfred Kusch, "The River and the Garden Basic Spatial Models in *Candide* and *La Nouvelle Heloise*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 12 (1978): pp. 1.

²⁰ Lester Crocker, "Order and Disorder in Rousseau's Social Thought," *PMLA* (the journal of the Modern Language Association of America) 94 (1979): 253

²¹ Kusch notes that "the Valaisans...have forsworn the exploitation of gold mines that exist in their region, as gold would encourage greed" (Manfred Kusch, "The River and the Garden Basic Spatial Models in *Candide* and *La Nouvelle Heloise*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 12 [1978]: p. 9).

²² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, or the New Heloise*, trans. Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 1997), p. 387.

²³ p. 387, Stewart trans; add ref**),

²⁴ **add WW ref to 'Tables Turned; and Thoreau's walking, p. 751

²⁵ **add ref: (p. 394, STEWARD trans).

²⁶ **add ref: p. 389; STEWARD trans

²⁷ add ref: (p. 391, STEWARD).

²⁸ add ref for Gómez-Barris**

²⁹ Jennifer Atkinson, *Utopian Studies* 18 (2007): 239.

³⁰ Susan Cross, "Revolutionary Gardens," *American Art* 25 (Summer 2011): 30.

³¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, or the New Heloise*, trans. Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 1997), p. 394-398.

³² add ref: (pp. 394-395 STEWART trans).

³³ **gloss these terms in endnote