

The publication written by two authors, Matthieu Dejean and Perrine Galand-Willemen, tells the story of the French garden of Chanteloup, a Renaissance mansion garden established by the Villeroy family shortly after 1560 for the aristocrat and thinker Jean de Neufville, who wanted to turn his garden into an intellectual and aesthetic experience.

The book concerns an interdisciplinary study and description of the garden. On the one hand, the authors showcase it as an architectural work immersed in a broad historical context, and on the other, they recreate its vision by means of an analysis of a poem that was written about the garden. In doing so, the authors paint a double portrait of the park, drawing and analysing two visions of the fantastic world of nature transformed by man.

According to the preface, the book was written at the initiative of Matthieu Dejean, an expert in architecture and garden spaces. His aim was to reconstruct the Chanteloup estate. During his research, he analysed the text of *Cantilupum*, an example of Neo-Latin ekphrasis – a description of a work of art, in this case the eponymous garden. The edition of the poem is held in Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris; it was published in 1587. For this reason Perrine Galand-Willemen joined the research team. She is a prominent neo-Latinist who has studied the poetics of numerous Italian authors and their influence on their French counterparts, including the wife of the secretary of state Nicolas IV de Neufville-Villeroy, Madeleine de l'Aubépine Villeroy, who is believed to be the author of *Cantilupum*. She was closely associated with the court of Catherine de'Medici and was held in high regard by Pierre de Ronsard, who called her his spiritual daughter. The third part of the reviewed publication is devoted to the critical edition of *Cantilupum*, which also includes information about the authoress of the poem. During the research, Perrine Galand-Willemen came across the second surviving edition of this manuscript at the British Library in London, which dates from 1588.

The poem is not merely an example of a personal document, since it contains more than journal-like entries. It represents perhaps the most heterogeneous genre of modern culture: a *silva rerum*, inspired by a volume of poetry by the Roman author Publius Papinius Stacius (c. 45–96 AD). It combines emotionally charged and aesthetically moving descriptive passages with academic sections on practical subjects, showcasing the specifics of the operation of the presented garden. In this case, the description of the park is merely a pretext for praising the owner him-

REVIEW

THE HUMANIST GARDEN

A REVIEW OF *CHANTELOUP, THE RENAISSANCE GARDEN OF THE VILLEROYS. AN INITIATION TO HUMANISM*, DROZ PUBLISHING HOUSE, GENEVE-PARIS, 2021

Aleksandra Jakóbczyk-Gola
Museum of Polish History,
University of Warsaw

Wilanów Studies
vol. XXIX, 2022, pp. 483–493
Yearbook, E-ISSN: 2720-0116



Matthieu Dejean and
Perrine Galand-Willemen

CHANTELOUP THE RENAISSANCE GARDEN OF THE VILLEROYS

AN INITIATION
TO HUMANISM

DROZ

self and the philosophical concepts of humanism he followed. The text includes a number of literary and artistic connotations present in the Chanteloup garden and embeds it in a broader cultural context. The aim of taking a walk through the garden's various nooks and crannies was not only to experience sensual pleasure, but also to experience moral transformation, based in this case on Stoic models, in line with the Renaissance and Mannerist concept of the garden. Perhaps, as the authors suggest, the text was written as an eulogy to the Villeroy family, who fell out of favour with the royal House of Valois.

Dejean and Galand-Willemen's book keeps surprising the reader, starting with the multitude of works cited. Matthieu Dejean point out that his inspiration stemmed from numerous French travel journals. He repeatedly refers to these texts to reconstruct the space of the Chanteloup garden to the fullest possible extent. He also relies on documents preserved in French archives, along with other European and American libraries, as well as textbooks on gardening, in particular Peter Lauremberg's *Horticultura* published in 1631. This in-depth study is confirmed by translat-

ed excerpts from sources, depicting Chanteloup as perceived by authors who had seen the garden as it used to be. This collection of testimonials comprises the second part of the book.

A successful and deeply convincing reconstruction of the garden constitutes its first part. Dejean points out that the main assumptions that led to the creation of the garden can be traced back to the imagination and vision of culture proposed at the Valois court in the late period of its existence. This part also outlines the intellectual and artistic context of the court and a broad landscape of Renaissance France ruled by this house. The description focuses on the period of 1550–1620, depicting the upheavals taking place in the general area of Paris, with provincial residences and European solutions left in the background.

It is thus worth taking a closer look at the reflection of Chanteloup as presented by Dejean and Galand-Willemen and as expressed through nature and language. The Villeroy family held key positions at the French court, which, Dejean suggests, allowed them to have direct contacts with Italy and to employ Italian artists and craftsmen. In his view, the Chanteloup park exhibits some influences of the Medici garden in Pratolino. The links and contacts with the highest strata of the French culture, on the other hand, resulted in the transfer of the architectural principles of the Valois gardens to the family's estate. Some of the most important aspects of those included using poetry, literary motifs and artistic theories of Antiquity as a source of inspiration. The Villeroy family was also familiar with the solutions of the Fontainebleau school. For this reason Chanteloup was created as an unusual combination of two streams of artistic influence stemming directly from Italy and France. It is an amalgam of the models of the most outstanding intellectual and aesthetic creations of the Renaissance era.

The garden at the Chanteloup castle has become famous primarily for its extraordinary collection of topiaries, that is artworks created from living shrubs. *Ars topiaria* – the art of decorative pruning of trees and shrubs to turn them into geometric shapes – was already known in Antiquity. Renaissance gardeners returned to this technique, but interpreted it differently. Sculptural forms were given not only to blocks, columns and individual trees, but also to entire rows of plants. As a result, architectural plans of gardens became more visible and interesting. Walls and galleries were created out of dense hedges. This gave rise to evergreen tunnels, where one could stroll regardless of the season. In Chanteloup, there were sculptures made of shrubbery that mimicked architectural elements, as well as those that attempted to reproduce nature in line with the Mannerist vision of the illusion and mimesis of nature. Some referred to scenes and characters presented in the verses of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with particular attention to the transformation of a person into a plant, with focus on the character of Daphne. Dejean also makes

an attempt to reconstruct the list of species of plants and vegetation grown in the castle's gardens based on the surviving sources.

In addition to the topiaries, the Chanteloup garden was famous for its numerous grottoes and fountains, as well as automatons that amazed visitors with their various functions. These were mainly water jets that sprayed surprised visitors, as well as other devices based on hydraulics, including figures depicting scenes from the twelve labours of Hercules. The paths were decorated with mythological statues, creating an open-air glyptotheca of ancient or antique figures; a visitor could relax by the fountains amidst the greenery. Their water cooled the air and repelled insects. Many of the elements were designed to evoke associations with the world of Antiquity, as well as to point to its function as the origin of the then-contemporary culture. Walking the avenues of the Chanteloup was a kind of moral initiation, a journey through Stoic and Christian values. The Villeroy family were also avid collectors. Their gardens were home to not only the ancient sculptures, but also archaeological finds or various curiosities, such as zoophytes – organisms thought at the time to be intermediate between animals and plants.

The entire garden contained about fifty separate arrangements depicting buildings, figures and objects that sometimes even moved, all with the theatrical use of nature. These peculiar compositions, accompanied by plaques with Latin texts, illustrated the quoted passages from various literary works. In some cases, the garden scenes also showcased various topics in astronomy, geography, religion and ancient history. Among Chanteloup's alleys one could find miniature models of famous monuments, such as the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, Trajan's Column, the Lighthouse of Pharos and the Circus Maximus.

In the Polish literature on gardens, the works of Longin Majdecki, Gerard Ciołek, Janusz Bogdanowicz, Małgorzata Szafrńska and Seweryn Małowski highlight the importance of the eighteenth-century French school of garden art for Polish culture. The ideas of André Le Nôtre represent a turning point which is said to have brought a new architectural understanding of gardens, one characterised by a unified vision for the residence and its surroundings. And yet, as Dejean and Galand-Willemen point out in their monograph, one must not forget the great French achievements in this field in the earlier eras.

Owned by the Villeroy-Neufville family, the garden of the Chanteloup castle (Saint-Germain-lès-Arpajon) was one of the wonders of the French Renaissance, which could be compared to the finest Italian or French gardens of the period. It showcased a humanistic vision of the harmony of the world and the perfect union of man and nature. Only insignificant traces of its former glory have survived to this day. The study by Matthieu Dejean and Perrine Galand-Willemen enables the modern

reader to go back in time for a brief while. It offers an opportunity to go for an intellectual walk through the avenues and alleys of a garden that enchants the readers with the uniqueness and richness of nature's forms. Chanteloup comes alive; the reader experiences its architectural and historical shape, as well as the poetic, intellectual vision of a garden. Going on this walk together with the authors of the monograph is definitely a worthwhile experience.

ALEKSANDRA JAKÓBCZYK-GOLA

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8282-6724>

A culture expert, philologist and art historian; a certified curator in the team of curators of the permanent exhibition in the Polish History Museum. She specialises in the cultural history of Old Poland, particularly the issues related to iconography, symbolism, history of museums (especially the culture of collecting in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) and relationships between the religious culture during the Middle Ages and the traditions of the Christian East in Poland. A participant and coordinator of research projects, a curator of exhibitions as well as an author of dissertations, articles and three monographs: *Akt pamięci. Tradycja akatystowa w kontekście form pamięci* (2014), *Gabinety i ogrody. Polskie nowożytne traktaty architektoniczne wobec kultury kolekcjonowania* (2019) and *Ogrody zwierząt. Staropolskie zwierzyńce i menażerie* (2021).

The review was conducted as part of the individual research.

Contact: jakobczyk.gola@gmail.com



European Route of
Historic Gardens
Itinerario Europeo dei Giardini Storici
Itinerario Europeo de Jardines Históricos
Itinéraire Européen des Jardins Historiques

Cultural route
of the Council of Europe
Itinéraire culturel
du Conseil de l'Europe

