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The Consolation of Botany, or the Significance of the Pause

I am an observer, not a moralist.
—Jean-Jacques Rousseau

BOTANY AND CIVIC INSECURITY appear, at first glance, incompatible. Most plants are sedentary. Patience distinguishes those who study them. For Kant, flowers embodied the idea of an end in themselves: they exemplified the autonomy of the aesthetic. “Flowers are free beauties of nature,” he wrote, classing flowers under the heading *pulchritudo vaga.* He meant beauty that eludes utilitarian evaluation. Among the meanings of *vaga* are “rambling, roving, roaming, wandering, unfixed, unsettled and vagrant.” So it is that a sedentary entity, the flower, received from Kant an epithet signifying an uncertain, migratory or nomadic status.¹

¹Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* 1.1.16. Kant adds that flowers constitute “free beauties” only insofar as a person does not regard them in terms of their natural purpose, that is to say with reference to their organs of fructification. Contrary to Kant, botanists fully cognizant of the sexual function of flowers have nonetheless considered themselves in the presence of “free beauties.” But is there a limit on this beautiful freedom? Flowers and women have long been interchangeable tropes for each other. Conscious of such reflexive associations, Mary Wollstonecraft expressed the wish to “rouse my sex from the flowery bed, on which they supinely sleep life away!” She adapted the vegetable analogy thus: “The conduct and manners of women, in fact, evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state; for, like flowers planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty .... One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education” (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Carol H. Poston, 2nd ed. [New York: Norton, 1988] 121, 7). Note that Wollstonecraft insists on the utilitarian potentials of women over their aesthetic appeal—reversing Kant’s emphasis.
This minor paradox reflects a larger one. From the beginning, with Theophrastus of Eresus (d. 287 BC), intimations of social insecurity and the promise of consolation have together shadowed the practice of botany in the West. A garden, walled or not, always testifies to the desire for a defined space. Because willed conclusiveness characterizes them, gardens resemble some linguistic phenomena. Take the Greek term *taxis*. *Taxis,* "arrangement," comes second of the five traditional parts of rhetoric. At the same time, this term supplies the first half of *taxonomy*, the major enterprise of a systematist such as Linnaeus. Rhetoric has always been a necessary preoccupation of botanists. The founding figure Theophrastus wrote both treatises in this field and the scientific tract *Explanations of Plants*. Theophrastus remains most famous, however, for the social commentary of his *Characters*—a satirical field-guide to his Athenian fellow-citizens. Like botany and rhetoric, politics and rhetoric have an ancient and indiscoverable connection. The botanist needs rational names and arrangements, the politician requires oratorical skill. Botany and politics both depend on the positing of distinctions, whether among plants or parties. Therefore a look at Theophrastus' definition of "definition" may help, like the tines of a trowel, to expose the radical—the ultimate root—implicating social insecurity with the consolations of botany.

Most of Theophrastus' rhetorical work has not survived. Luckily, in annotating Aristotle's *On Interpretation*, Boethius preserved the definition of "definition" that the botanist Theophrastus offered. "A definition is always one utterance, and this utterance ought to be delivered without a pause." Thus, the timing of the pause is the key to definition. Figuratively speaking, the pause raises walls around the linguistic unit and clarifies it as a definition, just as a gardener establishes the limits of a plot or a botanist discerns the unique features of one species of plant. Perhaps this emphasis on the definitive role of pausing led Theophrastus famously to answer the question "What thing in life is good or bad?" with the brief answer "The tongue."

Figures such as Theophrastus, Carolus Linnaeus, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Ernst Jünger, all sometime gardeners and members of diverse polities, differently interpolated their pauses, and cultivated the precarious definitions thus established with the assiduity

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devoted by horticulturalists to their varieties. The integrity of all definitions is presumably threatened by a vertiginous corollary of Theophrastan theory. Provided only that we not pause, one definition can potentially encompass everything. Where we choose to situate our pauses decides the scope of our definitions. In the course of a life, each of us may compile and consult a personal dictionary of such definitions. Theophrastus pioneered in the West some of the possible reciprocities and divisions between dictionary entries for 'botanist' and 'citizen,' as they are established by the strategic placement of the pause that distinguishes one role from the other.

Theophrastus, a pupil of Aristotle, wrote, of course, a playful Peterson guide to his fellow Athenians, the famous Characters. At root, the word 'character' denotes a distinctive, incised mark. This term has obvious applications for the taxonomist. Carolus Linnaeus himself used character to designate defining differences among species in Philosophia botanica (1751), a manual of techniques for plant identification and naming. Theophrastus typifies each of his human "characters" by a dominant attribute. Each is epitomized in the single name under which he lists them. He provides entries for thirty representative Athenian specimens, including (for example) the Ostentatious Man (No. 23) and the Authoritarian (No. 26).

A love of system obviously animates the Theophrastan projects of classifying plants and people. Many varieties discussed in his botanical works remain recognizable. Often his observations retain their validity: "Practically all evergreens fruit late. Their fruit or pericarpion is woody, as in the pine, the Aleppo pine, the cypress. It is dry in these; in others it is oily or has a certain viscosity, as in cedar and mistletoe." Since the Hellenistic period, these botanical givens have altered little, although our categories—for instance, 'evergreens'—may encompass their constituents differently. By contrast, greater topicality colours Theophrastus' depiction of

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3 Linnaeus also uses the Latin term character to mean the "essence" of something, as in the following claim: Character partium plantarum difficile eruitur nisi assumantur duo prima Pollinis & Seminis, "The essence of vegetable parts is only got at the root of with difficulty, unless two of them are first taken for granted, the pollen and the seed" (Philosophia botanica [Stockholm: Godofr Kiesewetter, 1751] section 88).

human beings. The place is Athens, the time around 320 BC. The predicament of the polis determines, in large measure, how No. 23, the Ostentatious Man, and No. 26, the Authoritarian, express their diagnostic and cardinal quality.

When Theophrastus flourished, the city-state of Athens no longer did—at least, not as an independent entity. Macedon dominated it. Rather than capitulate to the victorious Antipater, the orator Demosthenes had committed suicide. The battle of Crannon lost, collaboration became hard to avoid. For Theophrastus, these pressures on the Athenian body politic informed the manifestation of prevailing traits. His *Explanations of Plants*, analogously, innovated by stressing the importance of circumstances such as terrain and air for the well-being and fruiting of plants. Not just human ingenuity or will, but soil and climate—the genius of the place—determine the formal properties of an organism and the success of the gardener or farmer. This insight (a compromise between nature and nurture) can be glossed by Goethe’s polemical verse:

Natur hat weder Kern
Noch Schale,
Alles ist sie mit einem M ale;
Dich prüfe du nur allermeist,
Ob du Kern oder Schale seist.

Nature has neither shell nor core:
it isn’t a matter of either-or;
Just use yourself as a fair test—
Does shell or core describe you best?5

Theophrastus’ Authoritarian fulfils his definition by despising even the qualified democracy left to Athens after its defeat. Theophrastus observes that this oligarchically-minded man (to quote Joseph Healey’s translation) “hath learned this only verse of Homer ...

‘The State is at an evil stay, where more than one the Scepter sway.’” Emphasis on absolute unity of rule matches the Authoritarian’s singlemindedness and the simplicity of the character by which Theophrastus has chosen to represent him. As for the Ostentatious Man, he hopes to acquire glamour from association with those

belligerent celebrities, the new overlords of Athens. He drops names. In Healey's words, "he will tell you how he served under Alexander in that noble expedition; and what a number of jewelled drinking pots he brought away. He will maintain, though others dissent, that the artificers of Asia are better than these of Europe; then, that Arts and Letters came from Antipater."  

In his Characters, Theophrastus has merely transferred his taxonomical zeal from the world of plants to the world of society and politics. In each case, he retains his interest in both diagnostic essences and the formative influence of external conditions, whether climate or government. Nevertheless, he does not fuse botany directly with the strife-riven life of the polis. The Macedonian and the vegetable kingdoms remain disjunct though parallel universes. They are alike chiefly in that analytical passion can derive a plausible typology from each. Writing in the eighteenth century, Linnaeus idiosyncratically perpetuated this division between botany and the insecurities of society. Linnaeus' botany was public, celebrated—sufficiently accurate and perspicuous that its protocols met with wide adoption as well as praise. Privately, however, the taxonomist turned his systematic finesse to the theme of social strife in a context of sin and sacred chastisement. It was left to Rousseau and Jünger, troubled citizens and ardent amateurs of botany, to attempt to hybridize the spheres that separately—though discrepantly—engaged Theophrastus and Linnaeus.

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Carolus Linnaeus (d. 1778) famously instituted, among other things, the etiquette for what we still recognize as 'scientific' naming—the binomial method whereby, for example, the human race receives the generic name Homo and the specific name sapiens. His works include the already-cited Philosophia botanica and the ambitious Systema naturae, a field-guide to the creatures of the entire globe, comprehending insects, reptiles, amphibians, fish, birds and mammals. Less well known is his ethical manual Nemesis divina, never intended for publication and actually not published in full, even in his native Sweden, until 1968. This compendium, taxonomically

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organized, offered to Linnaeus’ son as a cautionary field-guide to
divine retribution, shows clearly where Linnaeus chose to make
those *pauses* by which Theophrastus insisted our *definitions* are
made.

Clearly, Linnaeus’ taxonomical natural history stood on one
side of a definitive divide. His *Theologia experimentalis*, his private
“empirical theology,” occupied the other. Playfulness inspired
Theophrastus when he wrote his *Characters*. Linnaeus, assuming
the mantle of admonitory patriarch, theodicean and critic of hu­
mainty, grew sombre and circumstantial in his *Nemesis divina*, a
merciless catalogue of human fallibility. Theophrastus found hu­
mour in the spectacle of social insecurity, as he identified it in acts
of boasting or autocratic grumbling. Linnaeus construed these same
behaviours as signs of how character will inevitably dictate fate—
how an ineluctable God administers fitting punishment to trans­
gressors for their deeds.

*Nemesis divina* opens with a poem:

*To my only son*

You have entered a world you do not know.
You see no landlord yet you wonder over its beauty.
You see everything go in confusion, as though no one
witnessed or listened.
You see the loveliest lilies suffocated by weeds.
But there dwells here a just God, who does right by
everyone.
Live innocently: a divine spirit is here!

... 

You don’t believe Scripture? Then trust experience.
I have assembled these few cases—the ones I remember.
Glimpse yourself in them and protect yourself.
Happy the man whom others’ risks renders prudent.

I would not have named names, I would rather have kept
them quiet,
But I must persuade you of the truth.
Keep them secret as the eye, as the heart.
Trust no one in the world; tomorrow he is your foe.7

7 Carl von Linné, *Nemesis divina*, ed. Elis Malmström and Telemak Fredbärj (Stock­
In Theophrastus’ *Characters*, the botanist’s delight in perceiving distinctions disported itself drolly among the fools of Athens. In Linnaeus, the same faculty attempts to justify the ways of a harsh God—or, as Linnaeus himself phrases it, ardently tracks the calamitous footsteps of Nemesis. Theophrastus offered his reader the pleasure of intellectual superiority to his hapless human specimens, eschewing in the process any great will to reform them. Linnaeus urged his son to learn from the disasters that have befallen others. These disasters have identifiable forms, like individual species.

Linnaeus’ dedicatory poem not only includes an emblematic plant—the innocent and abused lily—but it also draws terms from his public taxonomic methodology. There is a familiar emphasis on specimenal “cases,” on accurate “names,” and on observed “experience.” What kind of “cases” does Linnaeus collect in his field-guide to divine retribution? Theophrastus applied generic names—Authoritarian, Ostentatious Man—to his types. Linnaeus boldly supplied real proper names. In one thing, however, *Nemesis divina* and the *Characters* concur: their historical specificity. As Theophrastus documented his Athens, so Linnaeus instanced contemporary Swedish life:

*Bentzelia*

Norrerlius, librarian at Uppsala, takes [Bentzelia Greta] to wife; but she goes out at night with students, cannot endure her husband, incites the students to beat her husband, squanders her husband’s goods. The process of divorce lasts many years.

O. Rudbeck junior, full of malice toward Norrelius, who had put out [Rudbeck’s] book under his own name, the book that [Rudbeck] had sent with [Norrerlius] to Holland to be published—O. Rudbeck junior takes Bentzelia into his house. A hysterical woman, she is prone to fainting. Rosén was called, he is discovered one morning in her bed. She bears a child, Gierderschiöld is implicated; [he] lies.

Witnesses were summoned; [Bentzelia] claims there are never witnesses for that kind of acquaintance. Was judged a whore, Norrelius is rid of her.
When in 1743 Russian officers arrive, Bentzelia lives among these as a common prostitute; they beat her.

Travels to Norway; lives in wretchedness. Her son, intelligent, forges in Copenhagen our 24 & 36 taler banknotes; is handed over to Denmark; sent to Stockholm, is hanged while his mother still lives. 8

Linnaeus places this case-study of theodicy in action under the name of its apparent protagonist, Bentzelia. Her name sounds like a genus of plant. The natural history of her fate at the hands of Nemesis implies that she pays for her sexual licence. For that reason, Theophrastus would recognize in his fellow botanist and anatomist of society the impulse to isolate a single diagnostic character; here perhaps nameable as Infidelity or Concupiscence.

As in the operation of the Dantean contrappasso, symmetry marks the fate of the sinner. First faithless, Bentzelia descends into prostitution, her voluntary vice becoming her irrevocable profession; and she who instigated the beating of her husband finds herself eventually the object of reiterated blows. Nobody in this anecdote emerges honourably. Norrelius steals Rudbeck's work; in retaliation, Rudbeck seduces Norrelius' wife; and the physician summoned to help Bentzelia sleeps with her. Another man disclaims paternity of Bentzelia's son. This son goes to the gallows for forgery, an outcome presumably, from the vantage of divine Nemesis, equilibrating his mother's misdemeanours: she bore a bastard, he bastardizes the currency. 9 As for the anonymous Russian officers, they are hardly figures of probity. Linnaeus creates before our eyes a Dostoevskian ecology of retribution.

Another example focuses primarily not on a woman's, but a man's misdemeanours, catalogued, like Bentzelia's, under the protagonist's last name:

8 Nemesis divina 112.
9 Latin legitimizes Linnaeus' association of bastards and counterfeit money: adulterium is adultery, nummus adulterinus a false coin. A common theme linking Nemesis divina with Linnaeus' exoteric work is fertility, and the necessity of good guardianship (according to his own understanding) in its fulfilment.
Schmidt

In the town of Abo, in a convivial circle, were the mayor Morey and his wife, as well as Lieutenant Smidt [sic] and a number of others. They drink late into the night.

Morey's wife tells Morey to go to bed—he had had enough. She, too, heads off to sleep.

Smidt [sic] comes in, asks Morey to come out and have some more to drink, all very quietly so that Morey's wife wouldn't wake up. The ruse works.

Then Schmidt sneaks out of the crowd of drinkers, lies down naked with Morey's wife and has sex with her; she thinks it's her husband.

Morey is intoxicated, goes back to bed, conceives a desire to fondle his wife. She asks, “What, again?” and refuses. They figure out what's happened.

Morey's wife crashes into depression and almost loses her wits.

Smidt [sic] laughs about it, tells all and goes around boasting.

After several years, there's a marriage in Torne, where Smidt happens to be. The local Colonel is invited. Since he must travel over the ice and the ice is thin, Smidt is dispatched to conduct him, for the sake of safety, by an oblique route. The Colonel instead orders Smidt to proceed directly home; he himself will come when the courier sets off.

Smidt himself falls through the ice; his servant approaches but cannot help.

Proverbs 6:29. Never unpunished is he who undoes another man's wife.¹⁰

Some details of the Schmidt case merit attention. The Torne, in which the man freezes and suffocates, is a river debouching into the Gulf of Bothnia, which historically forms part of the frontier

¹⁰Nemesis divina 180.
between Finland and Sweden. Schmidt himself has infringed boundaries—moral rather than geographical ones; the boundary of the Torne he cannot cross in safety, even if he thought that he had managed in the past to violate a woman's and a marriage's integrity. The tag from Proverbs has, for Linnaeus in *Nemesis divina*, the general validity of a law of physics. In botanical contexts, Linnaeus described the flower as the marriage-bed of a plant: here, human matrimony occupies an analogously high place, deducible from the penalty imposed on the man who dishonours it, which is death.

The seeming accident that disposes of Schmidt has a dream-like logic. The Colonel involves Schmidt in the preparations for a wedding, the very ceremony the vows of which he clandestinely transgressed. Nemesis chooses the Torne, a limit, on which to exercise her vigilance. The Colonel enjoins Schmidt to take a direct—not an oblique—route across the ice; obliquity was the iniquitous means by which he managed to sleep with Morey's wife. He must follow a straight path this time. As Schmidt ruptured Morey's marriage by deceitfully entering the body of a faithful woman, so the false ice breaks beneath him. He relied on the excessive drinking of his victims: now he drinks more than his fill, flooding his lungs with chill water, in the uninvited and hypothermical embrace of which he dies. Even Schmidt's servant plays a role symmetrically with the constellation of players at the time of Schmidt's original crime: the impotent onlooker to the shattered ice parallels Morey the husband, stupefied cuckold of an unwitting wife.

On one occasion, in a private note, Linnaeus named Jean-Jacques Rousseau (d. 1776) as an exemplary provoker of Nemesis: Rousseau courted fame to excess. Ironically, Rousseau, ignorant of Linnaeus' theological preoccupations, turned to the work of the botanist precisely because it seemed to offer a special consolation—the consolation that comes from disinterested observation, rather than from moralizing. But the author of *Philosophia botanica* also wrote *Nemesis divina*.

Linnaeus chose to compartmentalize and pause between these works, setting off the world of botany from the world of society and its presiding goddess Nemesis. Because, so far as his written work was concerned, Linnaeus appeared to define botany as independent of theodicy, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was free to construe the work of Linnaeus in such a way that botany became an exemplary source of solace in opposition to the ranged forces of social
strife. In his novella *On the Marble Cliffs*, Ernst Jünger (d. 1998) contextualized the practice of such disinterested botany against a background of extreme civic upheaval, and with a degree of equivocality pronounced the inadequacy of botany under these conditions to guarantee solace. In other words, the definition of “observer” could not be kept distinct from that of “moralist”; the pressure of atrocity elided the pause and altered the nature of these definitions.\(^1\)

On 21 September 1771, five years before beginning his last book, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote a letter to Linnaeus. Rousseau offered unusual praise: “Accept with kindness, Sir, the homage of a very ignorant but very ardent disciple of your disciples, who owes in large measure to the contemplation of your writings the calm he enjoys even in the midst of a persecution all the crueler because it is covert—and because it conceals beneath the mask of goodwill and of friendship a greater detestation than hell has ever before incited. Alone with nature and with you, I spend delicious hours in my rural walks, and I derive more profit from your *Philosophia botanica* than from all ethical treatises.”\(^1\)

Rousseau had received a copy of *Philosophia botanica* in 1765. The intended sense of *philosophia* in the book’s title is “theo-

\(^{1}\)Scholars such as Janet Browne (“Botany for Gentlemen,” *ISIS* 80 [1989]: 593–621) and Londa Schiebinger (“The Loves of the Plants,” *Scientific American* 282.2 [February 1996]: 110–15) have recently made much of the sexism that pervades Linnaean botany. But in the case of Rousseau and Jünger, though their sexism is demonstrable in other contexts, botany appeals for reasons distinct from the erotic, especially because their prime desideratum, as field naturalists, is solitude or at least sequestration, not the opportunity for aphrodisiac reverie that Erasmus Darwin and Goethe (at times) foregrounded. Rousseau and Jünger, in fact, bear more resemblance in certain respects to the “hortulan saints” assembled by Maren-Sofie Røstvig in the two volumes of *The Happy Man* (Trondheim: University of Oslo, 1962). These British royalist poets celebrated the virtues of the rural retirement—or relegation—that Cromwell’s rule made prudent for them.

retical basis,' in this case for the reformation of botany, not of morals. Linnaeus’ own prefatory letter “To the botanist reader” lays out his aim of explicating a technical lexicon and describing the organs of plants. The ‘philosophy’ of Linnaeus’ manual has, therefore, scientific rather than obviously ethical force. Rousseau’s implicit collation of different genres—botanical guide, manual for moral direction—may seem peculiar. He acknowledges his rudimentary grasp of the science for which he claims so much, confessing to the ineptitudes of what *Philosophia botanica*, a compulsively taxonomic work, classifies, in laying out its readership’s potential degrees of proficiency, as a *tyro*—a new recruit. Though amateur, Rousseau asserts that Linnaean botany has delivered him from the conspiratorial evils of men to the flowers of good. Rousseau believed himself to be the object of a universal plot, a plot that he could only conceive of as a moral crime. The universality of Linncean taxonomy offered an alternate system—the system of nature—the neutrality of which might neutralize the effects of the plot against him.

Whereas Linnaeus actually classified Rousseau as the complicit victim of a moralistic Nemesis, Rousseau himself discovered salvation in Linnaeus’ seeming suspension of social judgement and social control. When Rousseau claimed, “I am an observer, not a moralist,” he purported to abandon the realm of ethical judgments, the terrain of his previous writing, in the endeavour to redefine himself as a Linnaean botanist. Indeed, to distinguish his former deontological self from his fresh scientific persona he even changed his name, becoming for a period of two years (1767 to 1769) the *philosophus botanicus* Jean-Jacques Renou. The name “Renou” sounds like a pun on the English verb *to renew*, and expresses the hope implicit in the nomenclatural switch.

This enterprise of personal redefinition found an earlier geographical corollary in the Island of Saint-Pierre, to which Rousseau withdrew after his lodging at Motiers was pelted with stones. An island offers a space naturally defined and circumscribed by the water that surrounds, protects and isolates it. In other words, an island splendidly embodies the definitive effectiveness of the Theophrastan pause. Rousseau remarks in *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* that such a location “is singularly well-adapted to promote the felicity of a man who likes to circumscribe himself.” When Rousseau explicitly mentions Theophrastus, it is to single out the excellence of the Theophrastan emphasis on botany: “Another fac
tor,” Rousseau remarks, “that has alienated the vegetable kingdom from the attention of sophisticated people is the custom of seeking among the plants nothing but drugs and antidotes. Theophrastus understood the matter differently, and one can regard this philosopher as the premier botanist of antiquity; moreover, he’s virtually unknown among us.” 13 Like Kant, Rousseau wishes to suspend utilitarian considerations in the contemplation of flowers; but his aversion focuses on the medical botany of the herbalists, exalting the apparent uselessness of Linnaeus. This uselessness was only apparent, as the schematized pulchritudo vaga of the floral realm insulated Rousseau from his paranoid fears. In fact, he wished to make a complete botanical inventory of the Island of Saint-Pierre, to bear the title Flora petrinsularis. He began to divide the island into quadrants for his census of plants. The whole cartographic operation can be construed as a purifying of the soil, rendering it completely transparent and alien to the conspirators by whom Rousseau felt oppressed.

The protagonists of Jünger’s novella On the Marble Cliffs also exult in Linnaean botany. This work, composed between February and July 1939, features a pair of botanizing brothers. No conspiracy of which they are the unique victims threatens them. Instead, a communal disaster impends on their ancient community, the Marina—a communal disaster resembling the ascendancy of the Nazi Party in Germany. Rousseau began a botanical survey of the Island of Saint-Pierre in the hope of decontaminating this terrain from the depravity of his persecutors. In Jünger’s novella, the invading hordes of the Head Forester are the ones who aggressively map the land: “They appeared to be re-surveying the countryside ... and they planted stakes with runes and bestial symbols on them.” 14 Rousseau’s botanizing promenades tranquillized him, because this way of navigating the world, plant by plant, seemed to evade or surpass the comprehension of his harassers. So long as he sought out plant specimens for his herbarium, he escaped the notice of his enemies, camouflaged as he was in the new self-definition, Jean-Jacques botaniste. The protagonists of On the Marble Cliffs likewise use botany as an apotropaic device; by means of this science, they

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strive “to produce the right and true topography” even in the face of their invaders’ encroachments (88). Nevertheless, the botanizing brothers cannot enjoy the security of their excursions in immunity: a search for a rare plant, *Cephalenthera rubra*, concludes with the discovery of this species in a clearing where torture occurs. Botany and civic strife spatially coincide; the garden is also the site of atrocity.

In Jünger, Linnaean taxonomy appears in the guise of a fortified refuge: “In the chaos, we sought, as it were, to stand by Linnaeus’ amazing opus, which constitutes one of those Martello towers from which the mind can survey zones of wild undergrowth …; Meanwhile, in none of our walks did we neglect the flowers. They gave us directions, just as the compass shows the way through uncertain seas” (85). Linnaeus was Rousseau’s contemporary, and Rousseau’s adherence to Linnaean botany had a fashionable aspect; in Jünger, part of the appeal of Linnaeus is his relative antiquity. The brothers consult “a great *Hortus Plantarum Mundi*”—a guide to the garden of the world—which the narrator characterizes as having been beautifully “hand-coloured, the way no one does it any more” (17). Rousseau received correspondence from Linnaeus; the narrator of *On the Marble Cliffs* looks, in reverential reverie, at “a leaf of paper, discoloured by time, on which was inscribed the signature of the lofty master Linnaeus himself” (18). As the Head Forester, leader of the barbarians, makes increasing inroads on the pacific civilization of the Marina, the protagonists of the novella do not renounce their ambition of compiling, like Rousseau, a botanical inventory; theirs has the title *Florula Marinae*.

Rousseau’s enterprise was insistently spatial in character: he wanted to divide the Island of Saint-Pierre into quadrants. Jünger’s narrator perceives tokens of temporality as well as of territory: in flowers’ “transiently bright figures,” he claims that “the Immutable reposes as in a secret hieroglyphic language, and they resemble the clocks on which the right hour is constantly legible” (63). Jünger figuratively promotes Linnaeus to the rank of marshal, granting him a marshal’s baton (*Marschallstab*) to discipline the chaos of natural kinds; this marshal forms a contrast with Hermann Goering, who received the same rank and accessory in February 1938.

The realms of the two marshals overlap atrociously in a crucial scene. Searching for a rare plant, “which spreads solitarily in forests and thickets and bears the name *Rubra*, which Linnaeus bestowed on it” (89), the narrator happens on the clearing where
the Head Forester has established his torture facilities, complete with dismembered bodies. Unfortunately, in *On the Marble Cliffs*, the Linnaean Martello tower falls, the herbarium goes up in flames, and the ambition of composing a botanical inventory of the Marina must be abandoned. The Rousseauvian imperative of defining the *observer* as distinct from the *moralist* cannot be sustained in the face of civic tumult. The two terms are elided, and Jünger’s novella ends with the narrator sailing off into exile.

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But Theophrastus leaves us with a utopian chance—a heady consolation. The possibilities of defining ‘citizen’ and ‘botanist,’ ‘observer’ and ‘moralist’ remain open, because they always combine the unpredictable contingency of historical circumstance with the liberty to pause according to each person’s sense of proper definition. In this sense, Kant was right: flowers are “free beauties.” In the politicized botany of John Clare (d. 1864), for example, we can read the lineaments of a different botany, a different citizenship. Clare’s botany is itself a conscious civic act, as when he personifies a wetland degraded by overexploitation in “The Lament of Swordy Well”:

> Of all the fields I am the last
> That my own face can tell
> Yet what with stonepits delving holes
> And strife to buy and sell
> My name will quickly be the whole
> That’s left of Swordy Well.15

But the integrity of an essay is like that of a definition. We must now pause.

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15Compare these lines, written before 1831, with the introduction to P.H. Gosse’s *The Canadian Naturalist* (London: John van Voorst, 1840). Gosse’s book appeared just after the rebellions in Lower and Upper Canada. Gosse explicitly severs the realm of ‘nature’ from that of ‘politics’: “[Canada] is here presented in a light on which there can be no clashing of opinion, no discordancy of sentiment: the smiling face of Nature … may be turned to by men of all parties as a refreshing relief from the stern conflict of political warfare” (vii).