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Morgan, Luke. The Monster in the Garden: The Grotesque and the Gigantic in Renaissance Landscape Design

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Morgan, Luke.

The Monster in the Garden: The Grotesque and the Gigantic in Renaissance Landscape Design.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Pp. 246 + 48 ill. ISBN 978-0-8122-4755-8 (hardcover) US\$65.

From the outset, Luke Morgan, whose previous work includes *Nature as Model: Salomon de Caus and Early Seventeenth-Century Landscape Design*, situates his study of early modern gardens in a revisionist history. Morgan draws upon a wide range of archival sources including medical, legal, and scientific texts so as to situate the garden within a broad framework of inquiry. His investigation considers how the Western imagination from the Classical period onward tends to think of gardens as places of amenity and pleasure, and begins by asking the question: if a garden reflects the imagery and iconography of a classical *locus amoenus* why did some Renaissance gardens incorporate images of suffering and violence? In his latest work, *The Monster in the Garden*, Morgan argues that the figure of the monster is not, as previously thought, an incidental addition but rather a key figure in the Renaissance that reveals *subterranean* socio-cultural themes.

The argument follows that all gardens have a virtual dimension that requires an addressee to “receive” it. A spectator or visitor who feels and/or senses the garden’s existence and understands its qualities in embodied ways, at least in part, participates in the garden’s purpose. This line of argumentation follows Michael Baxandall’s influential “period eye” methodology—definable as a way of perceiving the cultural conditions under which art in the Renaissance was created, viewed, and understood. To respond in some way to landscape is regarded by Morgan as a response to its design, and to study such a response opens the field to a more robust understanding of landscape design history in general. In this move to social reception and experience, Morgan’s book is well situated within the defining features of current trends in garden studies. As the title suggests, Morgan examines monstrous figures, namely of excess, deficiency, and hybrids. His focus on the themes of the monstrous, grotesque, and violence in the garden is translated from the principal source of iconography for the Renaissance garden: Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. As violent Ovidian motifs are translated into the literal garden space, the figures of excess, hybridity, deficiency, or gigantism complicate the initial assumption that one receives or

experiences a garden as an unrestricted reflection of paradise, or an idealized place apart.

The book opens with a selective historiographical excursus of the garden and regards how garden motifs have been read and co-opted by subsequent generations from “Fascism to Foucault,” and suggests that the figure of the monster in Renaissance gardens operated as a cipher for particular contemporary anxieties of the cultural moment. The opening chapter responds to Mirka Benêš’s observation that Renaissance gardens are a “heterotopic” space, as expressed by Michel Foucault in *Of Other Spaces*, which Morgan places in productive tension with Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on “grotesque realism.” He does this so as to reclaim the Renaissance garden from garden histories oriented toward landscape architecture and design to a more contextualized social and cultural history. From these foundational thinkers, Morgan proposes the possibility of a “reception history of the garden”—following the work and call for more reception studies by contemporary garden historians John Dixon Hunt and Michael Conan. Chapter 2 follows with a summary of the meanings and cultural significance of the grotesque and monstrous designs in the sixteenth century, with a particular focus on the antiquarian and artist Pirro Ligorio’s writings about *grotteschi* as understood alongside the medical texts of the surgeon Ambroise Paré. The next two chapters present the actual “monstruaries” of the Renaissance garden where Morgan surveys contemporary attitudes toward the grotesque and the monstrous followed by four case studies: the “excessive” Goddess of Nature of the Villa d’Este, the “deficient” Hell Mouth in Bomarzo’s Sacro Bosco (colloquially called Park of the Monsters or *Parco dei Mostri*), the “hybrid” figure of the harpy, and the dualism of the Renaissance giant in the landscape.

The final chapter closes with the most impressive feature of the book as Morgan extends his study of monstrous figures in a surprisingly new direction to include simulated “Etruscan” ruins within the Sacro Bosco. He convincingly demonstrates how drawing attention to an understudied aspect—the idiosyncratic use of “living rock” for the statuary—implies the grotesque. Rather than read the ruins as conforming to a sequential narrative, he takes a line of argumentation that follows the logic of the landscape.

Morgan accomplishes his goal: a reception study that presents a subjective, idiosyncratic, tendentious, and partial experience of a garden. This conforms to the larger argument of gardens as heterotopic spaces that require re-evaluation

as accommodating, if not promoting, inconsistency without firm resolutions. What Morgan ultimately reveals is a garden's meaning as experiential rather than abstruse or available only to a narrow audience. By so doing, Morgan has produced a cogent and lucid study of interest not only to specialists in landscape history but to anyone interested in the cultural history of the period.

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Pascal, Françoise, Marie-Catherine Desjardins, Antoinette Deshoulières, and Catherine Durand.

Challenges to Traditional Authority: Plays by French Women Authors, 1650–1700.

Ed. and trans. Perry Gethner.

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 36. Toronto: Iter Academic Press / Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2015. Pp.ix, 308. ISBN 978-0-8669-8530-7 (paperback) US\$34.95.

Perry Gethner writes in the introduction to this volume that “literary historians of the last two centuries made what seems to be a concerted effort to devalue women writers and ignore their work” (1). This is particularly true of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French women playwrights. The present volume is the most recent of Gethner’s important contributions to the recuperation of these authors and their works, and to their publication in French and in English. It complements well his earlier *The Lunatic Lover and Other Plays by French Women of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (1994). Here, Gethner offers a useful distillation of current research that situates the plays historically, thematically, stylistically, and technically. We learn that many plays by women were performed with considerable success in Parisian and provincial theatres, and published during their authors’ lifetimes or soon after, and we discover that they are indeed worth the attention of current students and scholars. The chosen works of four authors give a good sense of the range of themes, genres, and styles practised by women dramatists in the period. This collection is a pleasure to read. It will be useful as a course text and as an aid to the comparative study of early modern women dramatists writing in various languages.

Endymion, by Françoise Pascal, is a “machine play,” featuring magical dream sequences, fantastic scenery, monsters, tempests, transformations,