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Landscapes at the Service of l'Idéologie  
Nobiliaire***

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## THE RURAL ECONOMICS OF RENÉ DE GIRARDIN: LANDSCAPES AT THE SERVICE OF *L'IDÉOLOGIE NOBILIAIRE*

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### 1. Introduction

The marquis René-Louis de Girardin is remembered for having invited Rousseau at Ermenonville estate, near Senlis, in spring 1778.<sup>1</sup> His contribution to the history of economic thought has been neglected by commentators. It is true that Girardin wrote no books or articles specifically on political economy —his economic thinking is expressed mainly in the final chapter of his *De la composition des paysages* (1777)— and historians of the gardens of the 18<sup>th</sup> century have settled for linking his defence of the primacy of agriculture to physiocratic theses.<sup>2</sup> Although he exposed the thesis of exclusive productivity in agriculture, we consider that Girardin developed an original economic theory that sets him apart, like many others, from physiocratic and also from agronomist movements.<sup>3</sup> For Girardin, his ideas

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<sup>1</sup> René Louis de Girardin (1735-1808), Marquis of Vauvray, spent his early career as a military officer. In 1762 he inherited his mother's fortune including the 850 hectare estate of Ermenonville. This is where Rousseau died on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1778, and where he was buried until his body was moved to the Panthéon on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1794. Girardin became a member of the party of Jacobins in 1790. In 1792 he and his wife were put under house arrest until September 1794 and their chateau and gardens were pillaged. Disillusioned by the behaviour of the villagers of Ermenonville, he retired to a house at Vernouillet, where he created a small garden.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Baridon, M., *Les jardins* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1998): 901; *Le jardin paysager anglais au dix-huitième siècle* (Dijon: Editions universitaires de Dijon, 2000): 54; and M. H. Conan, Postface, in *De la composition des paysages, ou Des Moyens d'embellir la Nature autour des habitations, en joignant l'agréable à l'utile*, ed. René de Girardin (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1992), 207-208, 248-249. As far as possible, we use the English translation of Girardin, R. Girardin, *An Essay on Landscape; or, on the Means of Improving and Embellishing the Country Round our Habitations*, trans. Daniel Malthus (London: J. Dodsley, 1783).

<sup>3</sup> Girardin states that “the advancement of agriculture” is the “first and only support of population, of certain commerce, and of real and lasting strength” (Girardin, *op. cit.*, 158) and that “the wealth of France consists in land” (Girardin, Réponse de l'Auteur de la composition des Paysages à la question proposée dans le Journal du 5 Juin, page 1836, au sujet de le Notre, *Journal de Politique et de Littérature*, 25 June (1777), 269). Numerous defenders of the primacy of agriculture have a critical attitude toward the physiocratic doctrine — Pierre-Louis Goudard and Jean-Baptiste François Rozier— or toward the agronomists’ “new system” — Giovanni Fabroni,

are the result «of many years of observation, in France as well as in other parts of Europe»<sup>4</sup>, starting with England, which he visited around 1763.<sup>5</sup>

Girardin's work is part of the debate on 18<sup>th</sup>-century gardens that contrasted the French geometric model with the English landscape model.<sup>6</sup> Although critical of the French model, Girardin believed it was necessary to further this debate on the basis of a principle of continuity that rejects any idea of enclosure.<sup>7</sup> Girardin describes this principle of continuity, which falls within an aesthetic perspective, as «the fundamental principle of nature» consisting in «the unity of the whole, and the connection of the parts».<sup>8</sup> This epistemological *credo* then leads to the conclusion that landscapes must be created to reveal a vast uniformity with endless variety, allowing sensory impressions to be multiplied.

At the service of *l'Idéologie nobiliaire*<sup>9</sup>, the uniqueness of Girardin's economic thought on agriculture stems from this principle of continuity. While the development of landscape gardens enabled the gentleman's return to the country [Part I], in order to succeed, the rise of moral and civic virtues stemming from this was to be accompanied by amalgamating dispersed lands. This made it possible to establish a *culture complète*, an agricultural model that reduced operation costs and increased production [Part II], and finally allowed the monopoly in grain sales to be broken [Part III].

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Louis-Charles Fougeret de Monbron or Laurent-Benoit Desplaces. For a broad review of former authors see J. Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism and the Origins of the French Revolution* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 113-117, and of the latter ones see A. Bourde (1953, p. 68).

<sup>4</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 150.

<sup>5</sup> After the Seven Years' War, travel to England was one of the rules for cultivated Society. There is a continuous exchange of agronomists, scientists and political economists between England and France. See P. M. Jones, *Agricultural Enlightenment. Knowledge, Technology and Nature, 1750-1840*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2016), 65). For a broad view of the most common destination of French travellers during the XVIII century, see G. Gelléri, *Philosophies du voyage. Visiter l'Angleterre au 17<sup>e</sup>-18<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Oxford : Voltaire Foundation, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> One can find an analysis of this debate in M. Baridon, *Les jardins* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 697-937); M. V. Vercelloni, *L'invention du jardin occidental* (Rodez: Le Rouergue, 2009), 81-145; and J. M. Menudo and N. Rieucan, Une apologie des physiocrates par Condorcet. *Dix-huitième siècle*, 46 (2014): 657-672 [a extended version is available at [www.inventaire-condorcet.com/articles/2014\\_Menudo\\_Rieucan.php](http://www.inventaire-condorcet.com/articles/2014_Menudo_Rieucan.php)].

<sup>7</sup> “[I]n the more common sense of the word, by which we understand a piece of ground enclosed, and laid out in strait lines, or in some form or other — this by no means defines the species of garden which I have undertaken to describe; the first express condition of which is, that neither garden nor enclosure should appear” (Girardin, *op. cit.*, 7-8).

<sup>8</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 35-36.

<sup>9</sup> The term *idéologie nobiliaire* evokes a system of opinions which, based on the desire for civic and moral virtues to be developed, determines the attitude of a patriotic nobility towards the target of restoring the greatness of a nation by increasing economic resources. See G. Chaussinand-Nogaret, *La noblesse au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: de la féodalité aux Lumières* (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 2000, 25-38) ; and R. Galliani, *Rousseau, le luxe et l'idéologie nobiliaire: Étude socio-historique* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1989).

## 2. The figure of the gentleman gardener

Taking inspiration from the Ancient Roman *villa*,<sup>10</sup> Girardin conceived the agricultural domain of the *ferme ornée* as land that was both cultivated and embellished, as proclaimed in the subtitle of his work: *Means of Improving and Embellishing the Country Round our Habitations*.<sup>11</sup> The French expression *ferme ornée* was popularised in England by the poet William Shenstone, who used it to describe his land in Leasowes, admired by Girardin during his English stay *circa* 1763.<sup>12</sup> In this land of «picturesque gardening», non-cultivated terrain had to display veritable artistic compositions. In this respect artistic activity had to guide gardening: «It is precisely to prevent that it puts [...] the gardener instead of the painter [...] that I felt it necessary to give the public the result of my observations».<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to the defenders of the landscape garden, such as Jean-Marie Morel, Girardin's project proposed a new organisation for the countryside. Morel joined in the execution of Girardin's project on the land at Ermenonville, until a conflict arose regarding the use of buildings.<sup>14</sup> Morel wanted no artificial elements, and so he only accepted buildings with forms and functions related to the surroundings. To Girardin, the imitation of natural beauty was insufficient since its object was to bring back to nature individuals who had involuntarily been distanced from it. Landscape creation could not, therefore, be limited to a garden, but to the organisation of the countryside. This differentiation is explicitly expressed in the first French edition of *De la composition des paysages*: «These sheets were printed at the beginning of 1775; however a series of circumstances suspended their publications when this book was going to appear. A few works [including Morel's *Théorie du Jardin* (1776)] about several types of Gardens have appeared since then; however here we mainly deal with countryside issues, with its embellishment, with its cultivation, and with its subsistence».<sup>15</sup> This target appears to have been neglected in the landscape treatises of Girardin's time—starting with those by Claude-Henri Watelet (1774) and Jean-Marie Morel (1776) which were particularly well known in France. Just like the work of Jean-Roger Schabol (1774), these treatises limited

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<sup>10</sup> On this point, see D. Lambin, *Botanique et jardin anglais*, in *Jardins et paysages: le style anglais*, dir. A. Parreaux and M. Plaisant (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Publications de l'Université de Lille III, 1977), 290.

<sup>11</sup> See also the title of the last chapter: «Of the means of uniting pleasure with utility, in the general arrangement of the country» (Girardin, *op. cit.*, 148).

<sup>12</sup> On this point, see M. H. Conan, *op. cit.*, 207.

<sup>13</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 321,

<sup>14</sup> For a good discussion on this disagreement, see C. Dumas, *op. cit.*, 61-62.

<sup>15</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 9.

the activity of gentlemen to the garden, as their action was specifically distinct from the tasks of the farmer.<sup>16</sup>

Girardin proposed a moral organization of the countryside, where impressions could be multiplied unpredictably because landscapes had a power «over the senses, and, through their interposition, over the soul».<sup>17</sup> This was about establishing a «picturesque beauty [...] adored by the man of feeling», and «where nature unconfined displays all her graces».<sup>18</sup> On over 200 hectares of land, Girardin created different scenes which a walker discovered as he progressed along a designed itinerary.<sup>19</sup> But the impressions are not sufficient and Girardin adds philosophical inscriptions on the buildings in order to elucidate the composition<sup>20</sup>. Specifically, the agricultural area was organised with a variety of different crops and complemented with picturesque motifs —a winery based on the temple of Bacchus, or a Swiss house— so as to bring together the agreeable with the useful, since “it is impossible to alter one without essentially hurting the other.” To Girardin, the general system of nature was a union of relationships in which “any disunion tends directly to weakness” (*ibidem*) and where “all improvement, whether moral or physical, arises from the relation of objects with each other”.<sup>21</sup> With the creation of this picturesque rural environment, Girardin believed that he had found a relationship between the agreeable and the useful that had a positive influence on the motivation of the individual and on productive activity. He therefore hoped that «this change of things [...] will brings us back to a true taste for beautiful nature, tend to the increase of vegetation, and consequently to the advancement of agriculture, [and] the propagations of cattle».<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> On the distinction between gentleman and farmer in Schabol, see A. Bourde, *Agronomie et agronomes en France au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Sevpen, 1967), I: 202).

<sup>17</sup> (*An Essay on Landscape*, 134. On the influence of sensationist philosophy in the theory of garden, see B. Weltman-Aron, *On Other Grounds: Landscape Gardening and Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century England and France* (New York: Sunny Press, 2001), 126 and ff.

<sup>18</sup> *An Essay on Landscape*, 139. In both painting or garden art, the term *beauté pittoresque* describes what is observed and represented as a deserving artistic image. However, unlike *beauté de convention*, which requires an agreement on what is beautiful, *beauté pittoresque* emanates from nature regardless of place or time.

<sup>19</sup> For a description of the four landscapes of Ermenonville —the big park, the wasteland, the small park and the rural area—, see C. Dumas, *op. cit.*, 66-76).

<sup>20</sup> On leaving the area of Arcadia and entering into the forests, there was a small obelisk on which each face was dedicated to a poet: Virgil, Theocritus, Thomson and Gessner. From this point on, there was a series of inscriptions. For example, in a grotto next to the waterfall, Girardin inscribed a verse of Virgil's Georgics: «Speluncae, vivique locus, hic frigida Tempe». On a dolmen, we read «Between the gloomy forest, there studious let me fit, / And hold high converse with the mighty dead», and in Thomson's Grotto: «Shower make 'em both get under the cliff or grove / Thunder they hear no more but only the sweet love ». See M. H. Conan, *op. cit.*, 135-148) for material regarding the inscriptions on this walk.

<sup>21</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 134.

<sup>22</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 149.

In 1750, France was still, as is well known, an agricultural nation. The richest citizens were agricultural landowners, and in some regions the sale of wheat was the basic resource which allowed money to be distributed, and it was, in the country as a whole, the sustenance of the population. Most of the provincial nobility managed their properties directly and almost the half of them still lived on their land or in nearby small cities. This was not the case with the wealthy Paris nobility, who were ever more distant from and independent of their agricultural holdings<sup>23</sup>. It was there that Girardin established the figure of the gentleman gardener<sup>24</sup>: landscape gardens contributed to the return of «enlightened citizens» to the countryside.<sup>25</sup> They were the moral individuals who were the agents of change and, consequently, responsible for agricultural progress. “A virtuous citizen, called back to the country, by the real enjoyment of nature, will soon feel that the suffering of humanity make the most painful of all spectacles; if he begins by the admiration of picturesque landscapes which please the sight, he will soon seek to produce the moral landscape which delight the mind. Nothing is more touching than the sight of universal content.”<sup>26</sup> In return, these gentlemen gardeners were to bring with them greater resources for rural activity and, above all, « reflections and experiments ». It will thereby be «provid[ed] for the subsistence of those, whose bodily labour supports the men [the gentlemen gardeners] of more intellectual employment, who are to instruct, or defend society».<sup>27</sup>

Girardin’s proposal can be placed alongside a series of writings that the literature has grouped under the term *idéologie nobiliaire*. The writings of Claude Fleury, François Fénelon and the Duke of Beauvilliers built up a noble criticism of luxury, based on its responsibility for rural depopulation and ruin. As a result of the defeats suffered by France during the Seven Year War, an exacerbated outpouring of patriotism sought to restore the greatness of France by increasing economic resources. And so, throughout the second half of the 1750s and during the 1760s, a patriotic nobility intensified the connection between the regeneration of agriculture and moral regeneration, as highlighted by Girardin, based on the desire for civic virtue to resolve many problems and on the belief in the moral corruption of the nation brought about by trade. In his popular work *L’ami des hommes* (1757), the Marquis of Mirabeau called on landowners to return to their land and take an

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<sup>23</sup> On noble proprietors in the second half of the eighteenth century in France, see M. Marraud, *La noblesse de Paris au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 2000), 25.

<sup>24</sup> Here we use the term attributed to Shenstone by M. Baridon, *Le jardin paysager anglais au dix-huitième siècle* (Dijon: Editions universitaires de Dijon, 2000), 51.

<sup>25</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 158.

<sup>26</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 150.

<sup>27</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 149-150.



active part in its management. In *Les Intérêts de la France mal entendus* (1756), Pierre Ange Goudar called on the government to provide incentives for the nobility to return to the country, while in *Le Gentilhomme cultivateur* (1761-63), Jean-Baptiste Dupuy-Demportes recalled the tragic destiny of the nations that had abandoned agriculture in favour of the immediate pleasures of luxury.<sup>28</sup>

Girardin uses the habitual counterposition between the country and the city in this literature to explain the beacon effect that attracted the «enlightened citizens»; to the natural pleasure brought by contact with nature was added the sadness caused by the sight of the deplorable living conditions of the urban population.

[C]an there exist a more delightful habitation for man, than a neat farm house in the centre of a pleasing landscape? [...] Perhaps when every folly is exhausted, there will become a time, in which men will be so far enlightened as to prefer the real pleasure of nature to vanity and chimera.<sup>29</sup>

The novelty of Girardin's ideas resided in how to keep the gentleman gardeners in the countryside in order to modify their behaviour in such a way that they would not hesitate to put «their hand to the plough.»<sup>30</sup> In contraposition to urban civilisation, moral virtues depended on the beauty and simplicity of nature. However, we cannot say that agricultural progress was simply a question of aesthetics for Girardin. The «natural arrangement» of the land defended by Girardin thus coincides with the establishment of his *culture complète* as seen below. Contrasting with the malleability of the garden, cultivation undergoes a pressing need for results and a strict agrarian structure. Indeed, according to Girardin the institutional structure found by the gentlemen gardeners, a land in plots to be precise, at the start of their enterprise was the greatest hindrance to prosperity. It was necessary to redistribute land to allow individuals more contact with nature and thus imbibe more of its moralising and civic effects.

### 3. The culture complète

When Girardin started writing *De la composition des paysages* to repeatedly praise English agriculture in the mid 1770s he was expressing the same admiration as agronomes and physiocrats. We know that they were indeed great admirers of English agricultural

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<sup>28</sup> For a broad review of these authors, see J. Shovlin, *op. cit.*, 65-79.

<sup>29</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 159-160.

<sup>30</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 158.

prosperity.<sup>31</sup> However, it would be risky to think that Girardin took direct inspiration from these two groups, all the more so as he did not refer to them.<sup>32</sup>

His admiration for English culture appears to stem from personal experience, and his 1763 trip to England, rather than from possible readings.<sup>33</sup> Girardin's main reference to English agriculture focused on one particular element, the 'Compact model' that unified by law land which had been separated in the past. This aim to reunify land fits in perfectly with Girardin's aesthetic principle of continuity.<sup>34</sup>

This consisted in the redistribution of plots through a land exchange that regrouped plots belonging to the same owner. «This land reunification known in England as the *Compact*», Girardin explained «has been gradually established there for the last 50 years in different provinces through Acts of Parliament».<sup>35</sup>

Girardin was referring to the *Enclosure Acts*, promoted by the English Parliament from 1604. Up until then it had been the norm for owners to reach a collective consensus in the form of *Enclosure by agreement* although this normally resulted in only part of the land being enclosed. Although both mechanisms coexisted the enclosure laws were imposed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century given their speed, reliability and guarantees for the distribution of all the common land among the owners.<sup>36</sup> The process consists of three stages. In the first phase the owners of at least three quarters of the private land of the parish agreed to the

<sup>31</sup> In that regard, several passages from the first writing on political economy by Quesnay, the well-known article *Fermiers* (1756), may be cited.

<sup>32</sup> The task of differentiating *l'idéologie nobiliaire* from other groups or views that gave primacy to agriculture —e.g., agronomes, physiocrats or political economists— is complex. Only the physiocratic circle was well defined. Nicolas Baudeau summarizes what it is that makes a physiocrat: « The true economists are easy to characterize by one feature which everybody understands. They recognize one master (the doctor Quesnay), one doctrine (that contained in the *Philosophie rurale* and the *Analyse économique* [*Analyse de la Formule Arithmétique du Tableau économique*]), classical textbooks (*La Physiocratie*), one formula (the *Tableau économique*), and technical terms, precisely like the Old Chinese. » [N. Baudeau, *Nouvelles éphémérides économiques, ou Bibliothèque raisonnée de l'histoire, de la morale et de la politique, tome 3* (Milan: Feltrinelli editore, 1969), III : 111, our translation]. In addition, it is well-known the influence of agronomists Henri-Louis Duhamel du Monceau, Charles de Butré and Henri Pattullo on the Quesnay agricultural model, the references of Turgot to Duhamel when explaining decreasing performance or Duhamel's use of the term "net product" in his writings from 1750 have all been recognised. On the connection between physiocrats and agronomes, see Ll. Argemí, *Agriculture, Agronomy, and Political Economy: Some Missing Links. History of Political Economy*, 34 (2: 2002).

<sup>33</sup> He travelled for three years and also visited Italy, Switzerland, and Germany. Regarding Girardin's travels, see A. Martin-Decaen, *Le dernier ami de J.-J. Rousseau. Le marquis René de Girardin (1735-1808) d'après des documents inédits* (Paris: Perrin et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1912), 8, 71).

<sup>34</sup> On the issue of the principle of continuity, see above, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 107.

<sup>36</sup> From the 13<sup>th</sup> until the early 17<sup>th</sup> century the *Enclosure by agreement* reached 47% of English land, while the *Enclosure by act* covered a further 37 % in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. On this point, see J. R. Wordie, *The Chronology of English Enclosure, 1500-1914. The Economic History Review*, 36 (4: 1983), 494-495.



enclosure and requested Parliamentary approval for a law regulating this. The second phase marked the start of the parliamentary stage, where a commission was created to study the initiative and to hear the claims, replacing the traditional assembly debate in the parish. Following this phase in the House of Lords and its transformation into an *Enclosure Act*, the third phase developed the management process for the enclosure through the preparation of an arbitration process that, supervised by commissioners dispatched to the parish, mapped the reorganised plot, distributing gains and loads, setting timelines for the work and delimiting the obligations of the owners.

The need for a regrouping policy for agricultural properties in France, usually separate as a result of inheritance divisions, and with a shape that did not adapt to modern cultivation techniques, was proposed by Pattullo, who opted for legislators to intervene through the *Enclosure Act*, forcing owners to exchange plots.<sup>37</sup> Duhamel du Monceau (1762, I, pp. 376-377) preferred the *Enclosure by agreement* system given the spatial situation in some French parishes of houses forming a block that nobody wanted to abandon. Given the State commissioners' lack of information or honesty, Duhamel rejected an intervention.

Girardin's solution was different. As the process of regrouping and enclosing land was born from an agreement it was essential to concentrate on the mechanism to allow owners to become involved in finding solutions for the exchange of plots. Firstly, Girardin justified the intervention of legislators to force and order land exchanges. Freedom is not an alternative when it is poorly understood:

But to call for the much-needed unification of infinitely disperse and subdivided land placing agricultural workers in the centre of the land, a location that is as important for general interest as it is for private interest, we must first move aside a ghost; that of the whim of a few individuals, disguised by the imposing name of freedom. This word has long been abused and confused with capriciousness and licence and it would not be out of place to define it once and for all.<sup>38</sup>

A mistaken interpretation of freedom put property above the law, thus preventing the unification of land. Girardin proposed that: «To do what can be done is natural liberty; to do what one wants is caprice or despotism; to do what harms others is licence; to do what should be done is civil liberty, the only one suited to social order».<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> H. Pattullo, *Essai sur l'amélioration des terres* (Paris: Duran, 1758), 193-200. On this point, see A. A. Rozental, The Enclosure Movement in France. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 16 (1: 1956), 55–71.

<sup>38</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 106.

<sup>39</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 106.

The freedom that legislators must respect and promote is civil liberty, which procures «the general benefit to which all individuals, especially owners, are interested in contributing» and this «because the essential condition of society is the sacrifice of individuals of part of their interest» in exchange for «protection of the common force for the defence of their possessions, the fruits of their work and their personal security».<sup>40</sup>

Driven by «personal whims» and without respecting civil freedom, land exchanges with no legal framework «do not offer any of the advantages of a lasting agreement arising from enclosures or subsequent improvements» and «cause many disagreements, generating further problems and confusions in properties at the end of leases».<sup>41</sup>

Therefore legal backing was necessary for the unification of land. However, unlike the model applied in England, Girardin did not recommend the incorporation of State-appointed commissioners to the process: «Appointing commissioners, who, due to the stability of their post, their disregard for the wishes of the parties and the arbitrary nature of their fees have been able to inflict much abuse, should be carefully avoided.»<sup>42</sup> In this respect owners themselves were to establish «the choice of their arbiters» and pay them a fixed sum of «so much per arpent.»<sup>43</sup>

This new organisation of the land allowed the country to achieve what Girardin termed ‘*culture complète*’, attainable only «by previously gathering possessions around houses [...] and settling agricultural workers near their work.»<sup>44</sup> The main objective of the “Compact” was to allow the gentleman gardener to place himself at the centre of his properties. In this position, the moralising effect of the countryside on the «enlightened citizens» was greater due to the comfort brought by proximity to the land and because the *jardin paysage* exercised a greater influence on the observer.

The dwelling of the happy and peaceful husbandmen would soon rise up in the middle of their compact farms; their fields would be as easily cultivated as their gardens [...] [alinéa]. A narrow path cross the enclosure, and under the shade of the hedgerows, might successively lead to the different openings of the picture, and the ever animated view of cultivation, so as to produce the most pleasing variety.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*,. 106. On this analysis with clear inspiration taken from Rousseau see also Girardin (1791).

<sup>41</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*,. 107.

<sup>42</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*,. 108.

<sup>43</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*,. 108.

<sup>44</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*,. 229.

<sup>45</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*,. 160.

Agricultural workers in the centre of the land produced different positive effects, whose identification Girardin claimed had «been the purpose of my work and the sole merit I attribute to it».<sup>46</sup> There are three consequences: (i) a reduction in the cost of plots, (ii) an increase in production and (iii) a harmonisation of the interests of owners, tenant farmers and society as a whole. ‘*Culture complète*’ is therefore:

the only way to save on costs, [...] to diversify crops, to reduce consumption by horses which are very expensive and do not contribute anything; to increase the number of livestock which fertilise the land, feed man and supply factories; to unite the interests and approvals of the owner with those of the agricultural worker and of the State; to finally be able to maintain eighteen million men who from one day to the next have to face the possibility of not having enough money to buy the basics or are in too much distress to get by without money.<sup>47</sup>

The first two results are the direct consequence of the new agricultural management. The involvement of gentlemen gardeners in management improves results because his new location reduces operation costs—a lower transport cost, a saving of time and motions, a more active surveillance on farms—,increasesthe production due to the introduction of modern cultivation techniques—crop rotation, stronger fertilisers or improved livestock reproduction— and the long lease contracts made it easier to amortise investment. However, the combination of interests was only possible thanks to the control of the price of grain. As Girardin suggests, «we have come to present an essential aspect, a fair balance between the price of grain, the interest of State trade, the interest of owners and the subsistence of manual labourers.»<sup>48</sup> We will see below how having used certain descriptive elements of literature on freedom of trade, Girardin finally focused on the hoarding of land as he believed that this was the origin of the monopoly in the grain trade.

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<sup>46</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 160. The term *économie rurale* used by Girardin to describe agricultural activities is at this time relatively recent. It was not used in economic literature until the 1760’s, when it replaced the term *économie rustique*, used especially in Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*. On the use of *économie* in the *Encyclopédie* see C. Salvat, Les articles ‘Économie’ et leurs désignants. *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l’Encyclopédie*, 40–41 (2006), 107–126. Grimm also refers in a derogatory way to the Physiocrats as the «économistes ruraux». See M. Tournoux, *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister, etc.*, (Paris: Garnier, 1879), 8: 15).

<sup>47</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 160. Girardin also believes, on the one hand, that locating houses close to the land ensures the circulation of healthier air and, on the other, that an increase in production resulting from this situation enabled exports. On these points, see Girardin, Réponse de M. Gérardin [sic] aux réflexions qui lui ont été adressées par M. Va..... dans le Journal du 25 Juin. *Journal de Politique et de Littérature*, 5 July (1777), 321; and Girardin, *op. cit.*, 109, respectively.

<sup>48</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 110.

#### 4. Ending the monopoly in the sale of grain

Since the Seven Years War, the French government decided to try new political solutions and considered reforming the grain trade. The aims of the general controllers were mostly to give way to free trade but their projects did not really materialize.<sup>49</sup> Girardin tackled the matter of grain commerce (*ibidem*, 110-115) by opposing to the economic policy models of Sully and Colbert, who defend respectively the interests of farmers and manufacturers without resolving the situation of the employees, — expensive cereal in the case of the former and low salaries in the case of the latter.<sup>50</sup> Girardin adhered to the system of free commerce of grain promoted by the edict of freedom of trade of grain of September 1774, during the ministry of Turgot. Positive results, just as they were announced, were indeed numerous: the price of grain was moderated, purchase was easier, grain was provided to the less fertile provinces and the costs of commerce were reduced. However, as had happened in the case of Sully's policy, the drawback of this system was its inability to guarantee the subsistence of field workers in the event of bad crops, such as those of 1774. In this case, Girardin attributed the problem to the unsuitable relationship between *commerce des travaux* and *commerce des subsistances*:

When subsistence is expensive, there are fewer jobs and more needs, as *commerce des travaux* is inversely related to that of *subsistances*. In the case of the former, too many sellers and too few buyers; hence the drop in the daily wage. In the case of the latter, too many buyers and too few sellers, hence the monopoly in the sale of subsistence goods.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> On the issue of the debates on the policy of grain trade, see the classic study of S. Kaplan, *Bread, Politics and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis XV* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976).

<sup>50</sup> The cult of M. de Sully, minister for finance of Henri IV, was revived by l'abbé de L'Ecluse Des Loges (1745). Following this trend, Quesnay praises Sully and criticizes Colbert, giving rise to an extensive literature comparing both ministers. On the latter point, see G. Weulersse, *Sully et Colbert jugés par les physiocrates. Revue des doctrines économiques et sociales*, 10 (1922), 234–251; and L. Avezou *Sully à travers l'histoire. Les avatars d'un mythe politique* (Paris: Ecole des Chartes, 2001). In the second half of the 1770s, the differences between Turgot and Necker, the author of an *Eloge de Colbert* (1773), over the reform of the grain market gave rise to texts which compared both authors with Sully and Colbert, respectively —e.g., *Entretiens de Périclès et de Sully aux Champs-Élysées sur leur administration, ou Balance entre les avantages du luxe et ceux de l'économie* (1776). On the debate between Turgot and Necker in the context of the debate over the pre-eminence of agriculture, see J. Shovlin, *op. cit.*, 142-150).

<sup>51</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 111-112. The distinction proposed by Girardin between *commerce des travaux* and *commerce des subsistances* probably stems from literature critical of free trade in grain. François Véron Duverger de Forbonnais (1754, I, p. 95) made the distinction between *concurrence du travail* and *concurrence des articles* in order to present the wage assimilated to the price of goods, and consequently, influenced by abundance and scarcity —see also Forbonnais, *Principes et observations économiques* (Amsterdam: Marc Michel Rey, 1767), I: 34. Although Du Pont already used the term *commerce des subsistances* [*Éphémérides du Citoyen* (Milan: Feltrinelli editore, 1979), 200], Necker popularized it for his part when presenting grain commerce as a special case requiring specific regulation given the type of good exchanged. Although the term *commerce des travaux* did not appear in this work, Necker refers to the «competition between men needed to work for a living.» J. Necker, *Sur la législation et le commerce des grains* (Paris: Pissot, 1775), I, p. 157, our translation.

Even with the implementation of free trade for grain, families required higher incomes to acquire subsistence goods when these became more expensive as a result of bad crops. Therefore, workers sought more work just at the time when fewer field employees were needed on the land due to poor production. The result was an excessive labour supply that reduced salaries.

The imbalance between wages and the price of grain and its dire consequences for the population was a common theme among critics of the liberalisation of the grain trade that occurred in the 1770s. As is well known, the physiocrats believed a free grain market would lead to the *bon prix*, that is, a price that covered the costs of production, generated significant revenue for the proprietor and was not too high for the consumer. To increase consumption, it was necessary to find a *bon prix* that enriched the farmer, who would increase his investment in order to generate a greater net product —i.e., public revenue increased as well— and higher income that would increase the consumption of manufactured goods by the landowners<sup>52</sup>. This is how, in the end, the activity of the nation as a whole increases.

Criticism of this liberalisation theory was wide and varied. Galiani believed that the grain market did not operate under the same laws as others because people are not been accustomed to take care of their own subsistence. A gradual transition from the policy of ‘royal paternalism’ to a free market was necessary until the people became accustomed to the operation of a commercial society. Necker’s view was that the grain market needed special treatment since the prices did not reflect the real market situation —to understand the price, it was necessary to consider negotiating power, the information available to the agents and the time dimension of the trade. Clear market regulation rules were needed to allow everyone to subsist (producer, trader and consumer). Linguet thought that the law on free exportation increased the incomes of landowners and impoverished the workers. If the landowners and the government did not maintain cereal prices at a reasonable level, the consequences would be generalised chaos arising from a revolt by the poor. With less confidence in the market as an assignation mechanism, Mably suggested that it was not the spending of landowners, but the spending of the population that drove agriculture. With liberalisation, the dominance of the landowners (owners of the means of production) and the merchants (owners of the commercial capital) increased the misery. Interests had

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<sup>52</sup> See J. Cartelier, L’économie politique de François Quesnay, in *Physiocratie: droit naturel, tableau économique et autres textes*, ed. J. Cartelier (Paris, Flammarion, 1976), 9–62 (1991, pp. 41–47).

to be reconciled by creating citizens' assemblies where they would find a common interest to compensate the unequal division of labour.<sup>53</sup>

Girardin's criticism of the liberalisation of the grain trade was different. He believed that the price of grain was at a level that was structurally too high due to the «incredible disproportion between the limited number of those with grain to sell and the multitude of those forced to buy.»<sup>54</sup> Girardin's explanation focused on monopolistic behaviour on the production side, since it was there that he found the cause of the high price of cereals under a free trade system. Specifically, there was a monopoly in the sale of grain caused by the unsatisfactory land distribution, to which Girardin referred again:

Therefore, we must return to the origin of this incredible disproportion [between the number of suppliers and demanders for grain] as the cause of this miserable situation which most of the inhabitants of our country bewail. However, I believe I have found this origin and I say it because nothing is of more interest than preventing suffering and ensuring happiness. [...]. Indeed, the distribution of our land is undoubtedly that most opposed to nature, as it is divided into small dispersed parts on the one hand, [...] and on the other joined into large farms to facilitate the monopoly. This inevitably gives rise to the conflict of diametrically opposing interests between the owners and agricultural workers, and those with no property or crops, as the interest of the former is to sell for a high price, while the interest of the latter is to buy cheap.<sup>55</sup>

Unlike the proposals from agronomes such as Pattullo or Duhamel du Monceau, which were relatively detached from concerns regarding the behaviour of the market and were essentially motivated by the adaptation of land to modern cultivation techniques, Girardin suggested that the unification of land made it possible not only to increase production but also to overcome the problem of monopoly by increasing the number of plots worked. Thus, he states:

To do so, would it not be more appropriate and justified if the same law which establishes the continuity of land greatly benefiting the owners also ensured subsistence for everyone? Couldn't this same law which would restore continuity through legal exchanges also force owners to truly lease them out instead of deriving profit from their lands for themselves?<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> For a comparison of the objections to grain trade liberalization in the 1770s in France, see G. Faccarello (1988, pp. 124-140), A. Orain (2012, pp. 14-20) and J. Ferrand (2013, pp. 886-895).

<sup>54</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 112.

<sup>55</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 112-113.

<sup>56</sup> Girardin, *op. cit.*, 113.



The issue was proposed in terms of unification into large plots or dispersion into small plots which a single agricultural worker could manage.<sup>57</sup> Girardin's work does not include any of the physiocratic problems of *grande culture* and *petite culture* as there is no confrontation between rich agricultural workers and lesser-paid agricultural workers. It is well-known that Quesnay, in his articles in *l'Encyclopédie* “*Fermier*” (1756) and “*Grains*” (1757), proposed the social reorganisation of the country through the replacement of small-scale cultivation in the hands of sharecroppers by large-scale cultivation managed by wealthy agricultural entrepreneurs. The introduction of capital into the operations of these wealthy farmers brought increased productivity to the land, as production techniques were modified, allowed the hiring of labour and brought greater negotiating power in the market since the urgency to sell no longer existed.<sup>58</sup> However, in Girardin the growth in production is not provoked by an increase in capital stock but by the new system for the management of production within his *culture complète*. Fewer farms meant both an excess of labour in the countryside, since agriculture is seasonal, and also a rise in the price of wheat, as competition between producers was not guaranteed. In short, large farms were the problem of a free grain trade.

To Girardin, it was preferable to increase agricultural production through a scenario of numerous farms than to make a few latifundia highly productive. The increase in producers heightened competition among sellers in the grain trade, reducing the price. Girardin also argued that the positive effect of a greater number of farms would benefit owners.<sup>59</sup> As regards farmers on small plots, the lower price of cereal affected their surplus but not their subsistence which was guaranteed by crops. As regards workers, the higher number of farms available meant that employees became farmers, reducing the labour supply and increasing salaries.

The combination of wealthier and fewer buyers and numerous sellers meant that prices came to depend solely on scarcity or abundance, never on the market power of its participants. This is how the natural distribution of the land, recovered through reunification, made the different interests of members of society compatible.

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<sup>57</sup> See Girardin, *op. cit.*, 108n.

<sup>58</sup> See for example G. Weulersse (1910, I, pp. 333-351) or C. Larrère (1973).

<sup>59</sup> See Girardin (1992 [1777a], pp. 113-115).

## 5. Final Reflections

The estate of Ermenonville, acquired by Girardin in 1762, was used to experiment with his ideas.<sup>60</sup> Reorganised after 1766 and destroyed during the Revolution, this space was conceived as a *ferme ornée*. Shenstone's name was inscribed in the garden of Ermenonville on an obelisk close to the altar of the *Révêrie*. Girardin considered himself to be a gentleman gardener living on a property where cultivated land and garden land were continuous. Both pleasant and useful, Ermenonville mixed its agricultural buildings with those for accommodation and rest. In addition, Girardin leased some small plots to agricultural workers. In general, *De la composition des paysages* is an excellent representation of how 18<sup>th</sup>-century gardens were not limited to the strictly 'horticultural' domain. Girardin's unique treatment of this issue fits into an economic perspective. This can be compared with trends encouraging architecture, art, theatre, literature, philosophy of knowledge and music.<sup>61</sup>

The thinking of Girardin has only been commented upon by landscape specialists, both contemporaries and later, because his work dealt mainly with gardens. This may be the reason why his economic thinking has been neglected. In this paper, we have attempted to explain how Girardin incorporated leading elements of an *idéologie nobiliaire* which, in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and in line with the primacy of agriculture, represented economic thinking that was distinct from that of physiocrats and agronomists.

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<sup>60</sup> A description of Girardin's reorganization can be found in C. Dumas (2001). Further details can be found in A. Martin-Decaen (1912, pp. 52 and ff.).

<sup>61</sup> On these different questions see especially M. Baridon (1998, pp. 801-937). For theatre specifically see M. Poirson (2013).