The construction of nature
Central Park revisited

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Publication Date:
2005

Permanent Link:
https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-a-005961741

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Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani
Summary

After an introduction to the role of theories of nature and wilderness based on Emerson and Thoreau in early 19th century America, the author elaborates on garden design in the vicinity of New York around 1850. The construction of an artificial, but civilized and highly aesthetical nature was realised in the Central Park that was meant for the recreation of the upper class. However, only 10 years after Central Park having been opened (1868) it became obvious that the original objectives for which the park had been designed and created diverted much from the actual uses that were made by the people visiting it. It was rapidly a vital green space for leisure and relaxation and ultimately converted to a park for the urban masses. On the whole Central Park was not only an experiment for structuring modern cities but became and has remained until today a constituting element of the city community. With its creation the park movement reached a first culmination point in providing green space for the growing demands of the expanding American cities.
The Construction of Nature – Central Park Revisited

Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani

In the 1830s, the writer Ralph Waldo Emerson settled in Concord, a small town west of Boston, in the midst of the Massachusetts forests, and soon gathered a circle of like-minded friends around him. Influenced by Immanuel Kant and his concept that creation was a still-incomplete process, the group of intellectuals believed that the action of a divine spirit was evident in visible phenomena. For them, nature was not what it appeared to be at first sight, but rather a symbol pointing to something beyond itself; for this reason, they called themselves Transcendentalists.

In his essay on “Nature,” Emerson concluded that it was only human history that gave nature its value. “Every natural fact is trivial until it becomes symbolical or moral.” He also regarded nature as being the most important source of inspiration for artists and architects, and he was firmly convinced that the “tranquilizing, sanative influences” of the American landscape would be able to neutralize and eliminate the “errors of a scholastic and traditional education.” He adopted the ideas of European Romanticism but then rejected all European styles quite rigorously. According to Emerson, the American artist should not copy models from the other side of the ocean, but should consider “the climate, the soil, the length of the day, the wants of the people, the habit and form of the government.” He should reflect on America, therefore, in order to create truly American art.

One of the most independent minds among Emerson’s entourage was Henry David Thoreau. After Thoreau had worked with him for several years as his secretary, private tutor, and gardener, Emerson placed a woodland plot on the shore of Walden Pond at his disposal. In 1845, the 28-year-old moved to the solitude of Walden to conduct an experiment in living that lasted two years and two months and is described in his book Walden; or, Life in the Woods.

Thoreau was influenced by a treatise written by a German physician, Johann Georg Zimmermann, Ueber die Einsamkeit (1756), a translation of which he owned. But in Thoreau, Zimmermann’s rational Enlightenment approach mutated into a form – both Romantic and practical – of cultural criticism, natural description, and poetry. He celebrates the freedom that can only be obtained through an absolute lack of material needs. Even the

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1 “The land, with its tranquilizing, sanative influences, is to repair the errors of a scholastic and traditional education, and bring us into just relations with men and things.” Lecture given to the Mercantile Library Association in Boston on 7th February, 1844, from www.emersoncentral.com, 22nd February 2005.
2 “Beauty, convenience, grandeur of thought, and quaint expression are as near to us as to any, and if the American artist will study with hope and love the precise thing to be done by him, considering the climate, the soil, the length of the day, the wants of the people, the habit and form of the government, he will create a house in which all these will find themselves fitted, and taste and sentiment will be satisfied also.” From Self-Reliance, Essays: first series, 1841.
3 Henry David Thoreau, Walden; or, Life in the Woods (Boston, Ticknor and Fields, 1854).
4 Johann Georg Zimmermann, Betrachtungen ueber die Einsamkeit (Zurich: Heidegger und Compagnie, 1756).
first chapter of *Walden* argues, under the pithy title “Economy,” that possessions enslave one. Thoreau’s slogan is: “Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity.”

**Nature as inspiration and education: the Hudson River school of painting**

The same untouched nature of which a precise and inspired observation gave Emerson and Thoreau their philosophical and moral impetus also served a group of American painters as a motif and source of inspiration. The Hudson River school discovered the beauty of the area north of New York and used it to celebrate the wild American landscape. With dramatic distortions of scale and strong colors, they transformed it into a materialization of the sublime, offering at the same time an invitation to explore it and experience its fascination.

Experiences of this type were intended not only for pleasure, but for spiritual purification in particular. Above all in the cycles of paintings by Thomas Cole – from “The Departure” and “The Return” (both 1837) to “The Voyage of Life” (“Childhood,” “Youth,” “Manhood,” and “Old Age”; first version 1839–40, second version 1842), to his well-known allegory “The Course of Empire” (“The Savage State,” “The Pastoral or Arcadian State,” “The Consummation of Empire,” “Destruction,” and “Desolation”, 1834–36) – the imaginary landscapes that serve as the background for fateful events and ultimately represent merely an exaggeration and transfiguration of the real American wilderness are actually participants in the story. As such they also, and even principally, serve as lessons and warnings. As in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, nature is a positive force that arouses, nurtures, and strengthens what is good in humanity. In this case, however, it is not nature *tout court*, but rather American nature, which represent something that has been lost in Europe and only exists on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

**American garden theories**

A similar ideology was pursued by the various horticultural societies that were formed in many places in the United States in the early 19th century, following the example of the one founded in London in 1804. These supplied the botanical foundations for the iconography of natural forms that was discovered and mythologized by artists during the same period. The Massachusetts Horticultural Society, founded in 1829, was particularly prominent among them.

Its members included Jacob Bigelow, a botanist and physicist from Harvard, who like many of his colleagues believed that the environment had a direct influence on the physical and spiritual health of human beings. Andrew Jackson Downing was another member – a gentleman architect and gardener who distinguished himself in practice as a talented amateur, and who edited the journal *The Horticulturalist* starting in 1846. His books *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America,* 5 *Fruits and Trees of America,* 6 and *Cottage Residences* 7 were successful publications that went through many editions. Finally, Frederick Law Olmsted, another amateur in the field of early landscape

architecture, also played a central role. Following an initial unsuccessful effort in Connecticut in 1848, he later managed a model farm on Staten Island and produced a genuine bestseller with his book *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England*, written in 1852 after an extended journey to Britain.

Downing, who had also been in England to study, and who incidentally had met the garden architect Calvert Vaux there and invited him to America, regarded the garden planner as the creator of the “midland-scape” that Thomas Jefferson had dreamed of for America. It was not only a matter of adopting and emphasizing the pleasant elements of the natural landscape, but also of accepting and making use of its sometimes uncanny wildness. Beyond the intensification of the “agreeable forms of nature” – which had earlier been discussed theoretically in the history of the English landscape garden by Sir Uvedale Price in his *Essay on the Picturesque* of 1794, and which had in practice been carried to a brilliant climax by Capability Brown – it was a matter of “expressive, harmonious, and refined imitation.” Downing, for example, recommended that the artistic English models should be imitated, and that they should be enriched with the aspect of the sublime (quite in accordance with Edmund Burke’s definition in his *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* of 1757).

Downing mainly chose the neo-Gothic style for his buildings. At a period in which the Greek Revival was at its climax in the USA, this was a revolutionary act. But in an article published in the *North American Review* in 1836, Henry Cleveland had already described the Gothic as being the highest expression of the Christian faith, and in some parts of the American architectural culture there was a growing conviction that classicism was obstructing the development of an original American architectural language. Although Downing led the American neo-Gothic revolution, he never devoted himself exclusively to neo-Gothicism. He rejected the simple repetition of models of whatever sort and attempted to create a new, eclectic architectural language based on the aesthetics of the picturesque. In this he anticipated several principles of the functionalism of Horatio Greenough and Louis Sullivan, since he rejected any form of imitation, defended the adaptation of buildings to their surroundings, and demanded honesty both in the materials used and in the construction.

**From cemeteries to the planning of residential estates**

One of the practical goals pursued by the horticultural societies was to establish cemeteries that were designed as parks, as an alternative to the traditional graveyards at city churches. This meant developing a prestigious external shape for a new, simultaneously religious and social feeling in which the strict memento mori was to be replaced by a freer, contemplative mood. The Mount Auburn Cemetery, for example, was established in Cambridge, Massachusetts on the initiative of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. With its winding pathways, generous green spaces left in a natural state, and freely shaped ponds, it became an archetype for the early American park cemeteries. The Egyptian-style entrance gateway marked the transition from the city and from uncultivated nature to a special place in which an artificial distillation of landscape was to drive away the specter of death.

By the 1850s, there were already ten park cemeteries of this type in America, including the Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia of 1836 and the Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn.

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8 Frederick Law Olmsted, the Elder, *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England* (s.l., s.n., 1852).
9 Sir Uvedale Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful; and, on the Use of Studying Pictures, for the Purpose of Improving Real Landscape* (London, 1794).
New York, of 1838. All of them showed evidence of English models being transferred to a new function in a new country that was still involved in disputes with its former “mother nation” – in connection with the Oregon territory at this period. From their model, the cemeteries even borrowed the use of small, handy guidebooks to help visitors find their way through the artificial labyrinths and assist them in decoding their iconography. The success of the cemeteries justified the approach taken: up to 60,000 people a year visited the civilized wilderness on the outskirts of the city, and the rural cemeteries became an achievement of American city planning that was as popular as it was original.

Before long, this successful principle was also transferred to the planning of residential estates. In 1853, Alexander Jackson Davis and Eugene A. Baumann, commissioned by Llewellyn Haskell, a New York entrepreneur who belonged to the Perfectionist sect, planned and built Llewellyn Park in West Orange, New Jersey. This was a spacious, romantic park in which 50 eclectically designed houses were built along winding streets, with a glorious view of the Hudson River. Each house had a private garden of between 12,000 and 40,000 square meters (ca. 3–10 acres) which by prior agreement was not permitted to be fenced off. The costs of managing the common central park were jointly borne by the residents. Both the landscape design and architecture show an effort not only to adapt to nature but also to intensify it and dramatize it. Beyond its architectural influence, the new estate also had sociological effects, since the elegant residential district, which was not far from New York, made it possible to live in an intermediate region between the city and the open landscape while still being able to carry out business in the city every day.

Additional park suburbs followed this pattern throughout the USA. In 1855, the landscape architect David Hotchkiss began the planning of Lake Forest, north of Chicago on Lake Michigan. The extensive grounds were used partly for a residential estate and partly for a college; when Market Square was later added by Howard V. Shaw, a distinctive public plaza was also included.

In 1869, Olmsted and Vaux, commissioned by Emery E. Childs Riverside Improvement Company, built Riverside near Chicago. In a *Preliminary Report upon the Proposed Suburban Village at Riverside, near Chicago*, Olmsted had a year earlier already presented a program and justification for the city planning strategy for the area:

“In the highways, celerity will be of less importance than comfort and convenience of movement, and as the ordinary directness of line in town-streets, with its resultant regularity of plan would suggest eagerness to press forward, without looking to the right hand or the left, we should recommend the general adoption, in the design of your roads, of gracefully-curved lines, generous spaces, and the absence of sharp corners, the idea being to suggest and imply leisure, contemplativeness and happy tranquility.”

The text continues:

“A few simple precautions of this kind, added to a tasteful and convenient disposition of shade trees, and other planting along the road-sides and public places, will, in a few years, cause the whole locality, no matter how far the plan may be extended, to possess, not only the attraction of neatness and convenience, and the charm of refined sylvan beauty and graceful umbragouseness, but an aspect of secluded peacefulness and tranquility more general and pervading than can possibly be found in suburbs which have grown up in a desultory haphazard way. If the general plan of such a suburb is properly designed on the principles which have been suggested, its character will inevitably also, notwithstanding its tidiness, be not only informal, but,
in a moderate way, positively picturesque, and when contrasted with the constantly repeated right angles, straight lines, and flat surfaces which characterize our large modern towns, thoroughly refreshing.”

Nearly 650 hectares (ca. 1600 acres) in size, the elegantly designed park on the Des Plaines river features opulent villas with large gardens, together with a shopping center. The noble and secluded idyllic setting on the outskirts of Chicago was easily reached from the Loop from the very beginning, thanks to a good railroad connection; it was immediately successful and established an influential standard. Only the Parkway, which would have enabled the lucky residents to reach the city nine miles away on horseback or by coach, was not constructed.

Central Park

On a hot, humid July day in 1844, William Cullen Bryant, journalist for the New York Evening Post, publicly proposed providing New York – with its 700,000 inhabitants then the largest metropolis in America – with an important park that would be accessible to every citizen. His proposals were enthusiastically welcomed almost unanimously, and a group of journalists, politicians, businessmen, landowners, and philanthropists threw their weight behind the creation of a large city park. It was argued that it would offer prosperous citizens an opportunity to show off themselves and their coaches during Sunday promenades; a beneficial influence would be exerted on the health and morality of the middle and lower classes, who would be diverted from their shabby offices and gloomy factories and would have their attention drawn to the beauty of American nature; in addition, entrepreneurs and house owners would be attracted by the increase in the value of the adjoining properties.

The interests of the property and real-estate owners proved to be decisive. In July 1851, the City Council of New York passed the First Park Act, approving the purchase of the area known as Jane’s Wood between Third Avenue and the East River from 64th to 51st Street. In the pages of the Horticulturalist, Downing, one of the most prominent advocates of the New York park, sharply attacked the site proposed by Bryant. The criticism was effective: two years later, the Amended Park Act was passed, and a large area between Fifth and Eighth Avenues from 59th to 106th Streets was expropriated and purchased; slightly later, it was to be extended to 110th Street, so that it covered a rectangle of approximately 4.5 km by 800 meters (2.8 miles by 874 yards) and a total of nearly 3,600,000 square meters (4,305,564 square yards). Also in 1853, the first commission for the establishment of Central Park (the name was already being used) was set up. A Board of Commissioners was founded in 1857, and the administration of the future park was transferred to it. The administration involved not only the planning, implementation, and maintenance of the facilities, including issuing the appropriate rules and regulations for use, but also obtaining the necessary financial resources and employing staff, amounting to 2500 people for Central Park. The project thus became a political issue.

New York City was a Democratic stronghold, but in the same year, 1857, the Republicans had succeeded in winning the state of New York thanks to support from farmers. They immediately brought the Board of Commissioners under their control. Egbert Viele was nominated as Chief Engineer, and Olmsted, then aged 34, was appointed as a Superintendent subordinate to him.

Viale had the area surveyed, and established a draft plan. This (and subsequent developments) only took place because Downing, the eminent authority in American landscape planning, had died in an accident in 1852; Downing would otherwise probably have received the commission directly. After initial agreement, the Commission expressed some doubts over Viele’s suggestions and decided to arrange a competition. This was held in 1857, specifying for the park design a hall for exhibitions and concerts, an observation tower, a fountain, a parade square, three sports fields and playgrounds, an ice-skating area and a flower garden. In addition, there were to be at least four roads crossing the space from east to west to connect the East Side to the West Side. Thirty-two designs were submitted; ironically, one of these was by Viele. The prizewinning plan was entitled “Greensward” and was signed by Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted.

The plan is clearly indebted to the tradition of the English landscape garden, and in particular to Humphry Repton, whose tempting technique of contrasting vedutas of the existing state with the suggested new design – presented in his legendary two hundred “Red Books” – was also used in the Greensward presentation. In the explanatory report, Olmsted and Vaux make explicit reference to Regent’s Park in London, as well as the Tuileries Gardens in Paris. They criticize the French boulevard system, as it sacrificed the unity of the green area to functional requirements, particularly those of traffic. By contrast, their park was to be an untouched, integrated site for recreation, contemplation, regeneration, and physical and spiritual purification: a piece of American wilderness, artificially (and demonstratively) implanted into the heart of the city. In this sense, Central Park was a radical reversal of the trend implicit in the rural cemeteries on whose experiments it was based: while they were deliberately located outside the city, in order to conjure up a rural idyll on the periphery, the new park dominates the center of the city, where it presents itself as a new and novel type of community site, replacing traditional religious buildings and civic centers.

Olmsted does not reject the city as such, which he regards as being necessary and unavoidable. “Our country has entered upon a stage of progress in which its welfare is to depend on the convenience, safety, order and economy of life in its great cities. It cannot prosper independently of them; cannot gain in virtue, wisdom, comfort, except as they also advance,” he wrote in one of his autobiographical fragments. But in his eyes, the city also needs to offer an antidote to itself. New York is not only an extreme example of a densely populated city that encourages epidemics, alcoholism, prostitution, and crime. With its rigid city grid, it is also emblematic of economic and political laissez-faire, the materialization of the optimal development of the real-estate properties, a symbolic representation of the exploitation of land and people. The young landscape architect contrasts the city’s stiff geometry with the gentle curves of the picturesque garden, which suspends the laws of exploitation and maximized efficiency by establishing a pastoral oasis. Laid out in the very midst of the necessary but oppressive capitalist city, this pleasant counter-world achieves an even more formidable polemical force.

To give this force full effect and to maintain it, Olmsted and Vaux create a strict visual and functional separation between the green area and the building area. The boundary is sharply drawn geometrically and is emphasized by fencing and a row of trees, blocking the view of the (then much lower) surrounding buildings. Like fortifying walls, they defend a site that is extraordinary in New York – because the metropolis besieges and threatens the idyll, which needs to be protected from it so that it can survive as a place of recovery - and of accusation.

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11 For his clients, Humphry Repton put his plans and drawings together into books bound in red leather, which gave them their name.
The material conditions in which this rather ambiguous ideological program was to be implemented were not easy. The ground in the area planned for the park was in parts marshy and in parts rocky and only covered with a thin layer of earth. The site contained two city water reservoirs – an old geometrical pool and an irregularly shaped new one – which separated the area into two parts and were to be left in place in the new plan. In addition, the Board of Commissioners of Central Park required four transverse roads through the park, leading to further division of the area.

Olmsted and Vaux placed the main entrance to the park at its south-eastern corner, at the intersection of Fifth Avenue and 59th Street. From there, a slightly curving drive leads to the Mall – a long, perfectly straight grand promenade nearly 400 meters (437 yards) long, flanked by two double rows of American elms. This is adjoined to the west by a music pavilion, a ball ground, and a broad area of lawn serving as a parade ground (the Green). The promenade leads to Bethesda Terrace, a large, geometrically shaped belvedere with a fountain at the center, in which a bronze sculpture by Emma Stebbins, *The Angel of the Waters*, is surrounded by four *putti* representing Modesty, Purity, Health, and Peace – referring to the biblical episode describing the healing power of a pool in Jerusalem. Bethesda Terrace actually opens onto a broad, picturesquely laid out artificial pond, the Lake, where small rowing boats are available to visitors. Beyond the lake there is the Ramble, an equally artificial wood criss-crossed by a labyrinth of paths, where Olmsted skillfully used the existing rocky landscape to create a spectacularly dramatized “wilderness,” planting it with a large number of different trees and bushes. Numerous small belvederes were placed on the rocky outcrops, which are set in the same relationship to the miniature forest of the Ramble as the raised main belvedere at Vista Rock Tower to the overall area of Central Park. In addition, the belvederes make the wilderness of which they provide a view appear unmistakably civilized. Further north lie first the rectangularly walled Old Reservoir and then the new water pool, shaped like a natural lake. The rest of the park area is more spaciously designed and crossed by a less dense network of pathways.

Olmsted and Vaux’s masterstroke, which did not escape the attention of the competition jury, was the way in which the access roads to Central Park were laid out. To prevent the four transverse roads from dividing the park area, they cleverly lowered them into the ground and even placed parts of them in tunnels. This enabled them to create a connected (and recreationally oriented) network of gently curving drives that remains completely separate from the noisy city and the through traffic (with its utilitarian connotations). Even landscape areas are carried over the lowered transverse roads, creating the illusion of a completely connected green area.

The drives themselves are variously sized, with a hierarchical arrangement of coachways, bridlepaths, and footpaths, placed and arranged with plants in such a way that the constantly new views they provide while people are driving, riding, or walking appear much longer than they actually are. In a park that is already large in any case, this creates the illusion of an almost limitless green area.

In this way, Central Park – which at first sight is merely a late successor to the tradition of the English landscape park – is turned into a laboratory for innovative traffic solutions. The drives and mall became the precursors of the parkways that were to be one of the most original creations of the American park movement. And the complex system of hierarchical and separate traffic links for vehicles, riders, and pedestrians were to be used in a remarkable fashion 50 years later in the reformist model city of Radburn in New Jersey, with a lasting effect on the imaginative world of international urban Modernism.
Use and alteration: “….. the people of New York are ignorant of a park”

Central Park opened in 1868, after 10 years of building work and countless political squabbles, during which an indignant Olmsted had on several occasions resigned his commission and his job as Chief Architect. The people of New York immediately welcomed the park with enthusiasm; in the following years, more than two and a half million visitors were counted annually. The new green area was effusively praised in the press, and its democratic character was emphatically commended: it was frequented both by “hard-handed labor” and by “soft-palmed wealth,” both by the “humble shop girl” and the millionaire. Olmsted had used similar arguments in presenting his park design as an important element in the moral and practical construction of a democratic America.

Popular though Central Park was from the very beginning, however, there was no sense in which it could initially have been described as having a genuinely democratic character. More than half of the visitors arrived in coaches, and the coach parade in Central Park actually became a social event, substantially increasing the chances of marriage for young ladies who took part in it. In addition, middle-ranking office workers and blue-collar workers also came to the park, usually by horse-drawn trams, to attend concerts, row boats, or go skating. In a perfectly self-regulating way, the hierarchy of the pathways made sure that visitors from such socially dissimilar backgrounds did not meet each other too often.

Olmsted himself had not intended the park to serve exclusively for a single, preferably superior, social class, but for a special type of visitor – those who, thanks to their attitudes and backgrounds, would be capable of appreciating it as it deserved. As early as 1857, in a lecture to the Commissioners, the Chief Architect had warned, “A large part of the people of New York are ignorant of a park, properly so called. They will need to be trained in the proper use of it, to be restrained in the abuse of it.” According to Olmsted, “abuse” included driving too fast in coaches, walking on the grass, boating, music-making, and drinking beer on Sundays, among other things. Gambling, fortune-telling, and peddling were strictly forbidden in the park, not least to establish a clear distinction between it and the bustle of the surrounding city streets. Various religious and ethnic groups were also excluded, including the German Gymnastics Club and the Irish Ancient Order of Hibernians. Only schoolchildren with a permit from their headmasters were permitted to play ball games.

In fact, Olmsted’s picturesque recreation machine, which distinguishes itself sharply not only from the metropolitan city grid of laissez-faire but also of egalitarianism, shares characteristics with the city of the Modernist period both in its functionalist aspects and in its class segregation? However, a citadel of good behavior and elegant taste was incapable of holding out for long in the midst of New York, against the onslaught of the city’s colorfully mixed population. Disapprovingly, Olmsted noted that there were always considerable numbers of “rude fellows beyond the school age” playing ball in the park, despite his ban. He even spotted young ladies stuffing their handkerchiefs with grass and throwing them about. New immigrants, homeless persons, tramps, and “other unpleasant people” were increasingly breaching the regulations and disturbing the contemplative idyll.

For Olmsted, the idyll was conclusively shattered in 1870, when the new Park Commission, dominated by the Democrats, approved the construction of five animal pavilions in the park. The wealthy residents of Fifth Avenue were horrified and attempted first to stop the building and then to have the zoological garden moved somewhere else. However, it became a great attraction, particularly for working-class families, and was soon an institution forming an indispensable part of Central Park.
Olmsted himself was no less horrified than New York high society. For him, the park was not intended to serve for amusement – quite the contrary:

“The proper and only justifying purpose of so large a park was to provide great numbers of people living in the compactly built town … with an opportunity to get quickly out of the scenery of buildings, streets and yards into scenery to be formed with a view of supplying a refreshing contrast with it.”

Finally, when even merry-go-rounds and donkey-riding were permitted in Central Park, Olmsted considered that his vision had been definitively destroyed:

“I think the park is going to the devil and I have great doubt whether the undertaking to provide a rural recreation ground upon a city site in the midst of a city like this was not a mistake, was not doomed to failure because of the general ignorance of the conditions of success and the impossibility of getting proper care taken of it.”

Vaux tried vainly to reason with him by mocking him in a friendly way and calling him “Frederick the Great, prince of the park police.” Olmsted insisted on defending his vision as the vision of an artist with all of the means available to him against everything that threatened to alter it. His relationship with the Park Commission increasingly deteriorated, and he was gradually relieved of all his duties and responsibilities. His attempted appeal to the public on behalf of the park in the form of a pamphlet\(^\text{12}\) was a wretched failure. Olmsted regarded his own failure as a failure of American civilization. In New York, at least, his experience showed, it was incapable of being saved and even less capable of being revived. It was therefore time for him to leave the sinking ship to the ungovernable, corrupt city and to settle in New England, the supposedly still-intact cradle of the good old America.

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Abb. 1: Thomas Cole – The Course of Empire: The Savage State, 1836

Abb. 2: Massachusetts Horticultural Society, Plan des Mount Auburn Cemetery, 1831
The rural cemeteries of America; Greenwood and Mount Auburn Cemeteries, New York, 1847
Abb. 3: Counsellors Daniel Dodge und Joseph Britton, Report 1852:
The plan shows the rectangular area finally selected for Central Park, and the area of Jones Wood on the East River which would have been accessible through Hamilton Square.
Abb. 4: Frederick Law Olmsted und Calvert Vaux, Competition for a Central Park, Projekt Nr. 33: The Greensward Plan of 1857 is supplemented with Veduten showing the actual situation and the projected view of certain areas; Vista Rock seen from Cherry Hill.
Abb. 5: Calvert Vaux und Jacob Wrey Mould, Bethesda Terrace, 1858-1864, with Bethesda Fountain, based on a project of Calvert Vaux and realized by the sculptor Emma Stebbins 1862-1873.

Abb. 6: Calvert Vaux, Bow Bridge, 1858-1862, crossing the Lake at its most narrow point.
Abb. 7: Calvert Vaux, Belvedere Castle auf Vista Rock, 1869, referring to a medieval European fortress.
Abb. 8: Frederick Law Olmsted und Calvert Vaux, Central Park, by 1858; view towards Southwest.
Working Papers International Series Forest Policy and Forest Economics; Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), Zurich, Switzerland
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