

The Temple of Night: some documents not included in my book *The Temple of Night at Schönau: Architecture, Music, and Theater in a Late Eighteenth-Century Viennese Garden* (Philadelphia, 2006)

John A. Rice, 2009

Lucia Mocenigo, letter to her sister Paolina, Baden, 9 September 1801, Archivio Memmo, Biblioteca Mai, Bergamo, quoted in English translation in Andrea di Robilant, *Lucia: A Venetian Life in the Age of Napoleon*, 2008, 146-147

The Baron finally arrived, followed by a party of the highest nobility. The large *caique* then sailed across the lake, trailed by two smaller vessels tied together and carrying an orchestra that played music during the brief crossing. We glided straight into a vast cavern hidden behind a sheet of clear, pure falling water. Inside, a crowd of spectators stood watching us from a bridge, under which we passed smoothly. I saw the Emperor and the Empress, the Crown Prince and his sister, mingling among the visitors incognito and watching us pass by. They wore unexceptional clothes and as far as I could see they were not accompanied by any member of the Imperial retinue, nor by any of their servants. Still, I was able to recognise them because I had seen them only a few days earlier. We finally disembarked. [Baron de Braun] held a torch that made light for those in front, while the rest of us stumbled along in perfect darkness. The unevenness of the narrow, tortuous passageway, the sheer number of people pressing against each other, inspired universal silence, and I let myself be carried by the flow until I was seized by nervous giggles. My uncontrolled laughter was all one heard in that gloomy underworld. Luckily we came to a resting area, with water games and lighting effects produced by artificial fissures in the rocks. Musicians played wind instruments behind a veil of cascading water. Further down the passageway, rest rooms were carved into limestone and illuminated by lamps of alabaster. The rest rooms were equipped to service twenty-four people of both sexes—here gentlemen and ladies use the same facilities. We continued our journey to the Temple of the Night and were soon enveloped by total darkness, an effect meant to enhance the contrast as we finally reached the temple itself. The building is formed by a circle of columns, sustaining an upper balustrade decorated with cupids. Alabaster lamps the shape of pyramids illuminate the vaulted ceiling: a deep blue sky, with twinkling stars and a shiny moon. At one side stands a larger crater, the Vase of Destiny. It is said that the vase glows in a particular way depending whether the answer to whatever thought is on your mind is yes or no. At the other side is the Book of Destiny, where those who want to question the vase must put down their name. Then a series of mysterious symbols on the ground lead one to the centre of the temple, where the Goddess of the Night stands on her chariot. I've never seen anything in such bad taste as that paltry wax statue being pulled by those scrawny little horses. Baron de Brown [*sic*] should have commissioned a better artist to do the work—Canova would have done a fine job. For a moment I was tempted to let the Vase of Destiny know what I thought about the Goddess of the Night. I caught myself just in time....

August von Kotzebue, *Travels through Italy, in the Years 1804 and 1805*, 4 vols., London, 1806, IV, 291-293

If the traveller, two posts from Vienna, can overcome his impatience to arrive at that metropolis, let him alight to see the [*sic*] Schönau, which is situated close to the road. Every part of this mansion attests the good taste of its possessor, baron Braun. It is particularly celebrated for an object *unique* of its kind, a temple of Night: to which you are conducted through a subterraneous passage by torch-light, till suddenly a door springs open, and you enter the sanctuary of Night; when nothing but alabaster vases reflect a dim light, and soft distant harmonies, repeated by echo, complete the enchantment. The tomb of the amiable poet Alxinger is likewise at Schönau. I seize this opportunity to correct an error which has crept into various narratives of travels and other works. The inscription on Alxinger's tomb was not written by me; but, if I mistake not, by my valuable friend Ratschky: who was intimately acquainted with the poet, and who alone could in consequence have composed an inscription demonstrative of such a confidential intercourse. I was not personally acquainted with Alxinger; for it was not till after his death that I went to Vienna. There is nothing of mine at Schönau, except the inscriptions in the subterraneous passages leading to the temple of Night.

Carl Theodor von Uklanski, *Travels in Poland, Austria, Saxony, Bavaria, and the Tyrol, in the Years 1807 and 1808*, London, n.d., 128-130

At the distance of two miles from Baden is Schoenau, the handsome estate of Baron Braun, which I visited in my return to Vienna. The park of Laxenburgh alone can vie with the pleasure-grounds of Schoenau. Nature and art have done wonders here; hills and dales, rocks and grottos, rills and ponds, are seen in pleasing variety with cascades and beautiful vistas. Exotic plants mingle in fond harmony with their indigenous brethren, and one is always glad to welcome a stranger.

Pursuing a canal I came to a waterfall, opposite to which I sat down under the shade of a blooming lime-tree, through the thick foliage of which no sun-beam could penetrate. Two cascades of different natures shewed me human life. On the right an impetuous torrent rushed furiously over fragments of rock, and fell thundering into the canal below—Such, exclaimed I, is the progress of passion: on the left a gentle rill glided down a smooth declivity, without sullyng its limpid sheet with the least foam—This, said I, is the regulated progress of virtue and reason. Where the canal sweeps off to the pond, you can at once overlook the park by various ways, which are cut through the wood in the form of a displayed fan. In every direction is discovered a striking object; now it is the plain chateau of Schoenau—now an extensive meadow scattered with busy mowers—here a sombre grove, or a mountain towering to the skies—there a cascade, in whose crystal wave the sun-beams tremble—or the giant dome of St. Stephen's at Vienna. The pond is covered with gondolas, and on its margin stands a fisherman's cot, with carp dangling from the roof: fish barrels, coiled ropes, and party-coloured nets and fishing-rods, fill the interior of the house, and painted oars inclose it like palisadoes.

At the head of the pond, towers an enormous rock; its bowels conceal a grotto, to which a sombre path winds down: a flambeaux is required to find the way through its mazes to a black folding door, which opens by a secret spring—this is the Temple of Night. Twelve columns of white marble support its circular architecture, whose frieze, like a zodiac, bears the twelve celestial signs. Consoling Morpheus, with a horn in his hand; Sleep, as a youth crowned with poppies; Dreams, as winged infants, and all the other attributes of rest, are carved between the intercolumniations. The principal niche contains the goddess of night, formed in wax; a black veil, scattered with stars, descends from her head: in her right hand she holds a faint-glimmering lamp of alabaster, and in her left the reins of the sable steeds. Over-head is an artificial firmament; little stars twinkle on its azure expanse; and the moon, from its zenith, illuminates the temple in a manner so deceptive, one really fancies one-self walking by moon-light. The impression which the whole produces is inexpressibly pleasing.

M. Marcel-de-Serres, *Voyage en Autriche, ou Essai statistique et géographique sur cet empire* [alternate title: *Voyage dans l'empire d'autriche pendant les années 1809 et 1810*], Paris, 1814, II, 211-213

Un des plus beaux monumens du parc est le fameux temple de la Nuit, dont on parle sans cesse aux étrangers, et qui est assez singulier pour piquer leur curiosité. A l'extrémité du parc et aux bords d'un lac assez vaste, on aperçoit l'entrée d'un souterrain, qui se prolonge par de longues galeries. On est tenté d'en sonder la profondeur, mais à peine y a-t-on fait quelques pas, qu'on entend le bruit sourd des torrens qui se précipitent, et dont le fracas épouvantable est rendu plus terrible encore par les voûtes sonores de l'édifice. On seroit alors tenté de retourner en arrière, craignant de tomber dans quelque précipice; mais la curiosité l'emporte, et l'on veut voir la fin de cette aventure. En avançant, on se sent mouillé par l'eau qui s'écoule, et l'on n'arrive ainsi que plus vite à une place circulaire, qui se termine par des portes d'airain dont la hauteur et la beauté attirent les regards. A peine les a-t-on considérées quelques instans, qu'elles s'ouvrent comme d'elles-mêmes. Une lumière mystérieuse permet de distinguer un temple de la plus belle architecture. Dès que vous en avez touché le seuil, une musique céleste se fait entendre et vous invite au doux repos. Revenu de ce premier étonnement, on n'est pas moins surpris en portant ses regards sur tout ce qui vous entoure. On se trouve dans un temple tout resplendissant de marbre, dont la voûte est rendue plus brillante encore par une infinité d'étoiles scintillantes d'une vive clarté. La lune y paroît tantôt dans tout son éclat, tantôt enveloppée par des nuages épais qui la dérobent par intervalles, en donnant au jour un ton plus mystérieux encore. La divinité de la nuit préside seule dans un lieu où tout retrace sa modeste beauté. Assise dans un char d'argent que traînent des chevaux ailés, du noir le plus sombre, la déesse, couronnée d'une guirlande de fleurs que laisse à peine entrevoir un voile blanc, parsemé d'étoiles, semble aller prendre son vol dans l'empire des airs, et répandre le repos sur les humains fatigués. On se sent même saisi d'un sommeil involontaire, et il paroît se glisser dans les veines avec plus de douceur que jamais. Ce jour mystérieux, cette musique que l'on entend dans le lointain et que l'écho de la

caverne répète et répète encore, tout vous porte au repos et à des idées de mélancolie. Il n'y a pas jusqu'au bruit éloigné des torrens, qui se prolonge sous les voûtes sonores des galeries, qui ne charme l'oreille et ne porte à la rêverie. Il faut l'avouer, si l'on ne venoit d'entrer dans ce lieu enchanté, si l'on ne savoit qu'on est auprès de Vienne, on pourroit croire assister à quelques mystères d'Isis, et commencer ces terribles initiations où le prestige des prêtres faisoit croire aux trops faciles humains que des choses trop hautes pour notre commune foiblesse leur étoient dévoilées. En cherchant à peindre ce que j'ai éprouvé, et en voulant donner une idée de cette imitation parfaite d'une des grandes scènes de la nature, j'étonnerai ceux qui n'ont jamais senti l'impression qu'un spectacle inattendu peut produire sur notre imagination.